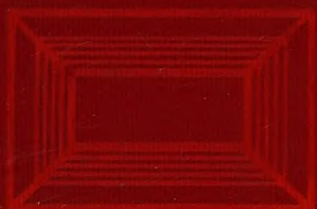
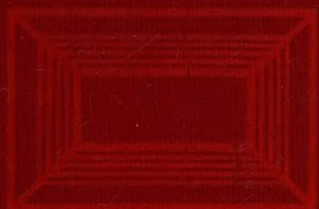
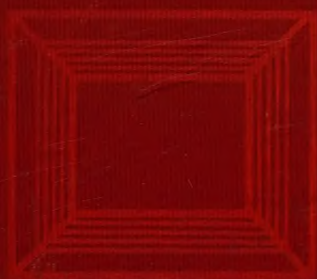
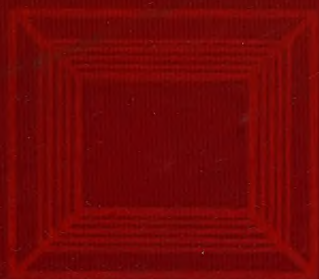


SERENA and SAMANTHA



TORBOLTON HOME



ROSA KELLEN HALLETT

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SERENA AND SAMANTHA

*BEING A CHRONICLE OF EVENTS
AT THE TORBOLTON HOME*

BY

ROSA KELLEN HALLETT



BOSTON
SHERMAN, FRENCH & COMPANY
1912

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TO
THE MEMORY OF
MY BELOVED MOTHER
ROSETTA MESERVEY KELLEN
WHOSE UNFAILING INTEREST
IN SERENA AND SAMANTHA
WAS THE SWEETEST OF TRIBUTES

The author wishes to acknowledge her indebtedness to the editors of *The Youth's Companion* for their kind permission to reprint the chapters of this book.

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CHAPTER I

THE RAYS OF *THE RISING SUN*

It was New Year's Day at "The Torbolton Home for Indigent Females," sunshine and azure skies without, but within, gloom and dejection. In the spacious southwest front corner room of the second story, little Mrs. Samantha Wells was dabbing wet blue eyes with a moist handkerchief, while her roommate, Mrs. Serena Dodd, sniffed tempestuously.

Presently a rustle of skirts sounded from the corridor, the door was pushed open, and Miss Lydia Barron, Mrs. Dodd's "Niece Lyddy from over to Holt," a tall, pink-cheeked young woman of thirty, was inquiring:

"Why, why, what is the matter?"

"They've stopped the paper on us, Lyddy," gulped Mrs. Dodd. "The morning paper, *The Rising Sun*, that Miss Timpkins, our matron, says has shed its glorious and enlightening rays over this Home and the inhabitants thereof ever since it was started. This is how it was: When Mr. Horace Wimbles—"

"Who's he?" asked Miss Barron, and little Mrs. Wells exclaimed, wonderingly:

"O me! O my! I presumed everyone throughout the len'th and breadth of the land knew the

Wimbleses and Wombleses! Why, the very first setback I had from my Absalom was about them! 'Twas six months and nine days after we was united in matrimony, and my wedding shoes was nigh worn to the ground, and I hinted to Absalom would he give me a couple of York shillings to have 'em tapped, and he said,—he was a mite fractious, and I sensed to oncet I hadn't ought to 've spoke afore breakfast,—‘We ain't no Wimbleses or Wombleses, Samanthy!’ But I spunked up, and says I, ‘Massy no! If we was, I'd want new shoes and not old ones cobbled up.’ And Absalom, he kind of grinned, and after he'd et eleven hot Injun-meal johnny-cakes well covered with best Porty Reeky molasses, he presented me with the two York shillings.” Mrs. Wells smiled happily.

“We were discussing Mr. Horace Wimbles, Samanthy,” replied Mrs. Dodd, in lofty rebuke, “His great-great-great-grandpa was in the Founder's boat—”

“Beg pardon, aunty,” interrupted Miss Barron. “I'm secretary of the Pioneers' League, and I can reel off that passenger-list forwards and backwards. There wasn't a Wimbles aboard.”

“For pity's sake, Lyddy Barron!” cried Mrs. Dodd. “Can't a body have two grandpas and one of 'em not a Wimbles? And four great-grandpas and three of them not Wimbleses? And eight great-great-grandpas and seven of

them not Wimbleses? And—" under her breath —"twice eight's sixteen—sixteen three great-grandpas, and fifteen of them not Wimbleses? And 'twas one of them fifteen that was 'What Cheered' at along with Roger Williams, and 'twas this one's only daughter that married the first Horace Wimbles." Mrs. Dodd's black eyes sparkled. "Got that, Lyddy?" And as Miss Barron nodded meekly, her aunt proceeded:

"And her being the one surviving offspring, Mr. Horace Wimbles, first, got all his pa-in-law's possessions, the acres and acres 'twixt the twin rivers and three-quarters of King Philip's Bay Islands, and they descended and descended to posterity till they fetched up with Mr. Horace Wimbles, fifth, and his only sister, Damaris Penelope, and then in popped Mr. Jesse Wombles and captured Damaris Penelope. So that made the Wimbleses and Wombleses, and though Mr. Horace Wimbles, fifth, was the last Simon Poor Wimbles there was, Torbolton folks got so in the habit of saying, 'Wimbleses and Wombleses,' zif they was roast pork and apple sass and mustn't be separated, that there is them that continner on even unto this day!"

"Ain't you going to tell Lyddy," urged plump Miss Sally Sloane, who had slipped in, unnoticed, "how Mr. Horace Wimbles, fifth, being a stout single gentleman, 'thout any incumbrances, and wearing a cocked hat and his hair tied up in a queue with a silk ribbon to the day of his death

lived all by his lonesome in this very house that Mr. Horace Wimbles, fourth, built right here on the tippest top of Quinton Hill? And ain't you going to tell," Miss Sloane's voice shrilled in her excitement, "how Mr. Horace Wimbles, fifth, told my pa his own self that them two statoos out on his gateposts, Polly and Minnie Nervy, used to get down and dance The Highland Fling about the garden every time they heerd the Old First bells ring out midnight? And ain't you going to tell—"

"I am if you 'low me the chancet," affirmed Mrs. Dodd, severely, "and leave me anything *to* tell." She turned an indignant shoulder to Miss Sloane and resumed, "When Mr. Horace Wimbles, fifth, demised, ninety-odd years ago, he willed this nice big brick building to us for our Home, and all the rest of his property to the city to have and to hold and to administer with due economy. And that same due economy is the lion's tail dangling kind of keerless-like out of the cage that every passer-by just admires to yank occasional. For if the city don't look out, back it may whisk to the Wombleses, who've got more'n a plenty already, still owning Damaris Penelope's po'tion, one-half all them acres and acres 'twixt the twin rivers, and one-half them three-quarters of King Philip's Bay Islands, not to mention an entire Adirondack forest that come in by way of our Mr. Wombles's ma, and is how he was christened Diedrich."

"Mr. Diedrich Wombles," broke in Mrs. Demeter Ford, who, with bashful Mrs. Prendergast, had just trundled old Mrs. Farwell into the circle, "belonged to my church. He sat right on a line with me, though he was on the broad aisle and me in a side free pew, and 'twas a real uplifting sight every Sunday morning to view him haul out a gold piece from his pocket, and if he'd been absent, two or three or sometimes four, and slide 'em over the aidge of the alms-basin so modest you couldn't hear 'em chink no more'n if they'd been dimes or nickels!"

"And I can bear further testimony," declared little Mrs. Wells, eagerly. "For after my Absalom give up the sea and took to teaming in Torbolton, he carted all Mr. Diedrich Wombles's wood, great logs for the dozen open fireplaces, all the kindling for the kitchen stove and the chunks to go under the wash-b'iler. Cords on cords of it altogether, and Mr. Wombles, he *never* disputed a bill! That's what my Absalom said he called a man!"

"Exactly," agreed Mrs. Dodd. "And there ain't been the slightest bit of an intimation that Mr. Wombles ain't perfectly satisfied with things as they be. Howsomever, the city has stopped the paper just the same."

"What's the city got to do with it?" demanded Miss Barron, impatiently.

Mrs. Dodd stared at her niece in surprise. "Why-ee! Ain't I told you that yet? It's the

city that subscribes to the morning paper for us out of them hundreds of thousands Mr. Horace Wimbles, fifth, left to be administered with due economy. But every year after the report of the Wimbles' bequest trustees is published, some nateral-born mischief-makers write to the paper, faulting that item:

"*The Rising Sun* for the Home for Indigent Females, eight dollars."

"What'd that first letter this year say, Samanthy?"

Little Mrs. Wells piped up, promptly, "'Why should the tranquil and serene pilgrimage of the venerable wards of the Torbolton Home for Indigent Females gliding swiftly down the shadowy vale of time, be j'opardized by information about Californy airthquakes or Alabamy tornadoes, or have their tender feelings wrung by furrin telegrams about them as have pounded their fingers a-nailing the Stars and Stripes to the north pole? No, a million times, no!' said he. 'How infinitely pre-ferrible a soothing volume of the "Spectator."' He'd got one, he said, he'd sell cheap."

"That," snorted Mrs. Dodd, "was the chipmunk in the chestnut-bag! Two words for 'Loyal Citizen,' that's him, and one for us! 'Twas the next one madded me most. 'Mr. Vokes Pop-you-lie.' He said we ladies wouldn't know an English budget from an American black bear if the pair of 'em crawled up our front path on their knees and pawses and pulled our front door

bell and hollered, 'How fare ye, ladies?' right at us."

"I would," quavered old Mrs. Farwell. "I come from Maine, and down there in my grandpa's woodlot up in the 'Roostook them black bears was thick as spatters, a-cramming theirselves to the brim with red ripe luscious rosb'ries."

"There!" triumphed Mrs. Dodd. "I knew a critter with a name like that couldn't tell the truth! And neither of them even cast one little sheep's eye at the next item below, '*The Rising Sun* for the Home for Indigent Males, eight dollars.'

"Furthermore and to boot, likewise, the city ain't shut it off on them neither, for Miss Timpkins telephoned straight over, and the manager himself answered, pretty considerable uppity, 'No, sir-ree, bob! Not by a long chalk!'"

Mrs. Dodd halted, a grim expression on her face; and bashful Mrs. Prendergast, dropping the handle-bar of old Mrs. Farwell's wheeled chair, gasped:

"But—but—they're men! And of course we ladies can't ever 'spect to be catered to like we was the superior sect. Man is always ahead of woman, and my husband, Daniel Webster Prendergast—he was selectman forty years down to Scatterwitzick—he said, the sooner ladies come to a realizing understanding that they couldn't *never* ketch up, the cheerfuller and more contenteder they'd be. And—and—"

She shrank back before the chilling gaze of her auditors, and Mrs. Dodd groaned sepulchrally, then remarked, in controlled accents:

"The Wombleses, Lyddy, being a sort of high connections of ours, we take a parlous interest in 'em and peruse the paper faithful in hopes to note all their doings, and I calc'late we don't miss much. Why, I s'pose Samanthy and me recollect the color of Mrs. Wombles's honeymoon bunnit strings better'n she doos herself. They was a bee-yutiful shell-pink, the *pree*-cise shade of the inside of them two big conches my Uncle Darius McGay lugged home to me from Afric's burning sands."

"Oh, no!" protested little Mrs. Wells, mildly. "Them was her sister Orella's, she that wedded the Duke of Marmalade. Mrs. Wombles's bunnit strings was Nile green. Don't you 'member, Sereny, they was pinned together with an elegant Brazilian bug that matched to a T?"

"H'm'm!" grunted Mrs. Dodd. "Well, I ain't argying! Anyhow, Lyddy, the oldest Miss Wombles debuted last year in a grand new ball-room erected a-puppus! There was Goblin mysteries hanging all around it, and it had a tossel-plated floor and a mahogany cornish inlaid with pearls, and stained-glass windows that Betty Macdonald and Nora O'Hara—they stood outside watching till after 'leven o'clock—said 'peared just like slices off the rainbows of Paradise.

"And *The Rising Sun* had a whole page about the hahnsome gowns and the oceans of hot house posies and everything there was for supper—salids and jellies and pattydefoy grass. We ain't never tasted that kind of grass, but if it's anywhere near as *dee-licious* as sparrow-grass—we have that for dinner at least twicet in the season—" Mrs. Dodd smacked her lips reminiscently—"it must be extry superexcellent!"

"And next week," burst forth little Mrs. Wells, "the oldest Miss Wombles is to be married, and ain't it turrible they've picked out this partic'lar time to stop our paper? Though having had all them warnings," she sighed deeply, "we'd ought to been prepared."

"What makes you think it has been stopped?" questioned Miss Barron.

"'Cause it didn't come," rejoined Mrs. Wells. "You see, when the boy got to the gate this morn-ing, I was waiting at the stairhead, and with my own two ears I heard him say to Betty Macdonald,—she was brushing off the porch—"There ain't any paper for you!" "

Miss Barron knitted her brows. "It's very strange," she commented. "It would have been more courteous to notify you by mail."

"They did," said Mrs. Wells. "I told you 'twas the paper *boy*. Girls ain't let to carry papers in Torbolton; and he was curchus enough. But facts is facts. He didn't leave us any paper. O me! O my! I wish my nephew Peter Rawdon

was here. He'd go right down town and investigate."

Miss Barron started up. "Dear me, Mrs. Wells, I can do that!" But little Mrs. Wells shook her head dolefully.

"I wouldn't bother, Lyddy. You ain't a man, you know. Now if my nephew, Peter Rawdon—"

Miss Lydia Barron's heels were, however, already clicking on the oak stairway, as the little woman concluded:

"Was only here! Oh, I wish, wish, wish, wish, wish!"

And somewhere it has been stated that if one only wishes hard enough the wish will come true; and certain it is that an hour later Peter Rawdon did march in, and scarcely had he crossed the threshold before the sad story was poured forth, and he was averring:

"Bless my heart! This is all wrong! I'll step down and attend to it."

"You won't need to, Mr. Rawdon," announced Miss Barron, jubilantly, from the doorway. "'Twas all a mistake. That young scamp of a newsboy was short one paper, and was too lazy to go back for another. That was all there was to it. And they advised about those letters to take them whence they came. And here's a copy of this morning's issue they sent to you." She thrust the crackling sheet, pleasantly redolent of printer's ink, into Mrs. Wells's small fist. "Good-by, I must run for my train."

Ten minutes more, and Mr. Peter Rawdon had also departed; and as the assembled company munched blissfully upon his offering of marshmallows, Mrs. Dodd said, somewhat indistinctly:

“Samanthy Wells, you turn to that society colyum, and read out about that kitchen shower the oldest Miss Wombles was to be treated to yesterday! Don’t you skip a kettle!”

It was still New Year’s Day at “The Torbolton Home for Indigent Females,” sunshine and azure skies without, and within, sunshine and happy hearts; for once more *The Rising Sun* was shedding its glorious and enlightening rays over the Home and the inhabitants thereof.

CHAPTER II

THE BIRTHDAY

MID-JANUARY, the weather still continuing fair, and afternoon at the Home. All was very quiet about the great building except in the matron's room, where little Mrs. Wells was chattering, excitedly :

"O me! O my! But I've had such a piece of work eluding Sereny Dodd! More'n ha'f an hour ago I turned down her coverlet for her nap, but lie down she wouldn't. Just sat stiff's a ramrod in her big Boston rocker, those black eyes of hers buttoned wide open zif she meant not to close a lash for forty year! But she couldn't keep it up, and now she's dozed off, all niddy-nodding; and here be I!"

She giggled delightedly; and Miss Timpkins, coiling up her hair before the mirror, smiled back at the reflection of the little woman. "Yes?" she said, encouragingly.

"I've been hoping and praying," went on Mrs. Wells, "that my nephew, Peter Rawdon—he's not my real nephew, you know, but was in my Sunday-school class back in '54, and always claims me for his aunty—would happen in, and the good Lord sent him yesterday, lugging a box of peppermints. And when I said to the dear boy,

'Peppermints are excellent, but a leetle cash, Peter—' he just roared, and fished down into his pockets and gave me this." She held up to view a shining coin. "And I want you should get Sereny Dodd a present from me. 'Twill be a surprise!" Mrs. Wells bounced joyfully on the chair on which she was perched, her little feet dangling. "She doesn't know I've got a penny! To-morrow's her birthday—mine, too. We're just of an age, seventy-nine years since we entered this vale of woe!"

"Seventy-nine!" exclaimed the kindly matron. "Why, I wouldn't guess that by nine years."

Mrs. Wells's face broke into gleeful radiance. "That's what Sereny tells me," she declared, "and that's what I tell Sereny. I could take off five years more without stretching the stocking a mite, if only Sereny hadn't stouted up so frightful."

"Well," said Miss Timpkins, accepting the proffered coin, "what shall I buy?"

"Soap!" affirmed Mrs. Wells. "It's my one desire, Samantha,' Sereny often says to me, 'that when I'm taken I'll be taken clean.' And I guess she will, she's a powerful scrubber. You get vi'let soap, that's my favor-ite."

She slipped from the chair. "There, that's off my mind!" And much pleased, Mrs. Wells tripped away.

Five minutes later, following a rap at the door, Mrs. Dodd entered, announcing, importantly:

"I've come on business."

Miss Timpkins glanced toward the clock. "The board's due at three," she demurred.

"That's all right," asserted Mrs. Dodd, settling herself firmly in the chair just vacated by Mrs. Wells. "There won't a one of 'em be here 'fore ha'f-past. Howsomever, I wouldn't've been so late if Samanthy Wells hadn't got one of her oneasy spells. She's been wandering hither and yon like a ha'nted sperit; every time I tried to get by, there she'd be a-marching and a-counter-marching. But now Sally Sloane's toled her in, and I've trudged along here."

"I'd have come to your room," said Miss Timpkins.

"'Twouldn't have done," replied Mrs. Dodd. "She'd have known in a minute something was up. Why only last night, I said, 'Samanthy Wells, if anyone told you they was going to deed you sixteen inches off one of them mudflats we see out in the bay at low tide, 'twouldn't be one toot from Gabriel's horn before yòu'd have the cellar dug, the walls up, pitch roof on and folks moved in and having a house-warming!' That's Samanthy—things open right up before her."

Again Miss Timpkins glanced toward the clock. "It's—"

"To be sure!" agreed Mrs. Dodd, cheerily. "And here I be, my tongue going zif 'twas a wind-mill on stilts, galloping two ways to oncet, not giving you the shadow of a shade of a chance to

ask, 'Why do ye so?' But I won't wait to be coaxed." She opened her fist and displayed a silver piece in her palm. "That's what my niece Lyddy from over to Holt give me for the makings of a new best cap, but the other one will last a spell longer, and she won't mind if I spend it on Samanthy. It's her birthday to-morrow. It's both our birthdays. We're twins," she stated, unctuously.

Miss Timpkins, who had been edging toward the door, halted.

"Twins!" said she, in great amazement. "Twins!"

Mrs. Dodd frowned, then sighed, "Some folks ain't any imagination! It's true as preaching that I was born in Chepiwanoxet, and Samanthy come by the way of Quonochontaug, and we never clapped eyes on each other till that May festival they asked us to the year we was both on the waiting list. But we was born the same year, the same month, the same day of the month, and the same day of the week, twins could do no more!"

Miss Timpkins laughed. "Well, that's so," said she, taking the money from Mrs. Dodd's hand. "What shall I buy?"

"Soap!" said Mrs. Dodd. Then noticing the matron's start of astonishment, "Yes, soap. That's what I love—nice sweet-smelling soap. When I was married," she went on, "the man Boldwood worked for sent me some for a wedding

gift. 'Twas rose-colored, rose-scented, and the box was tied round with gold cord. I *wish* I had it now. But there, I was young, and hadn't a thought for the morrow, and used it reg'lar so long's it lasted. 'Twas so pink and pretty! 'Twas a furriner made it, Boys at Sea. I wonder if you could get some like it."

"One can but try," responded Miss Timpkins, graciously.

"That's all," said Mrs. Dodd. She rose from her chair and moved ponderously in the direction of the hall. "Now I guess you'd better stiver. There's at least two autos a-chugging outside this very minute."

Again it was afternoon, and in their own sunny southwest room, Mrs. Dodd and Mrs. Wells were sitting, surveying the packages strewn about, packages in tissue paper, one tied up with violet ribbon and a tiny bunch of violets tucked in the bow, and one, so "pink and pretty," bound about with gold cord and "Bois et Cie," printed in gold letters along its side.

Presently Mrs. Dodd spoke in sepulchral tones:

"Samanthy Wells, I suspicion that Maria Timpkins told!"

"'Sh!" Mrs. Wells raised a warning finger. There was a tap at the door, and the next instant in walked the matron herself.

"Well, well, but you've been having a fine birth-

day," she congratulated. "Why the bell's been ringing all day with presents for you."

"Yes," said Mrs. Wells, slowly, "it has." Mrs. Dodd sniffed.

"H'm!" said she. "H'm! Presents! Such as they be!" She fixed the matron with bright unflinching eyes. "I was pleased as Punch when I got the violet soap from Samanthy. It's her favor-ite, if it ain't mine. And Samanthy was tickled most to death with what I gave her, she couldn't help it, it was so pink and pretty. And when Mrs. Orlando Waldron sent soap, I said to Samanthy, 'She's been president of the board many a year, and I do suppose she feels some intimate. We'll let it pass.' But when the soap came from Mrs. Frater, I'll own I conceited 'twas crowding the mourners. Still she is vice, and she means first-rate, and her husband's in that line. And you can take soap from the bosom of your family, your sister, so to say, and your friend and your friend's friend. But when the whole community stood up and hove soap at us, the attention was too p'inted for Sereny Dodd!"

She wheeled clumsily about in her chair and gazed out upon the blue waters of King Philip's bay, while Miss Timpkins gasped, in horror:

"You can't mean they all sent soap!"

"They did so!" Like a catapult Mrs. Dodd flung back the words; and Mrs. Wells nodded solemn confirmation.

A hot flush mounted to the matron's temples

and her voice trembled. "I'm very sorry," she began.

But Mrs. Wells interrupted. "Sereny! Sereny!" she admonished, prodding with vigor her companion's plump ribs. "Stop it, you're hurting her feelings."

The big Boston "rocker" creaked around, and once more Mrs. Dodd confronted the matron, but this time her rosy old face was full of contrition.

"For massy sakes!" she exclaimed. "I wouldn't do that for all the world and the little stars served up in a pewter porringer! Would I, Samanthy?"

"Not if you knew it, Sereny," acquiesced Mrs. Wells, mildly. Then she added with enthusiasm, "And, O Miss Timpkins, she and me have cooked up an elegant scheme!"

"'Twas your idee, Samanthy," said Mrs. Dodd.

"But you liked it."

"I did," concurred Mrs. Dodd, and Miss Timpkins inquired:

"What is it?"

"It's to have all the ladies in here to spend the evening," explained Mrs. Wells. "To come as soon as they can, and stay as long as you're willing. We'd have a splendid time, and before they went, we'd give 'em," she pointed at the array of boxes, "a souvenir of the occasion, the way they do at all the fine parties nowadays."

"That is really a beautiful plan," agreed Miss Timpkins, "and very kind and generous and—"

"Sho!" said Mrs. Dodd. "Sho! The question is, will you let 'em?"

"I certainly will," replied the matron.

Then there was prinking! Spotless white aprons were extracted from bureau drawers and tied in stiffly starched puffy bows, best collars were carefully fastened with huge cameo brooches or twisted gold breastpins, and each old lady assumed what was formerly the hall-mark of gentility, a tall back comb, some of them "real tortle," and the others a splendid imitation.

And during the supper-hour Betty Macdonald, the parlor-maid, and Nora O'Hara, the cook, collected the wonted chairs of the inmates and carried them to the room occupied by the hostesses of the evening.

"For," said Betty Macdonald, gravely, "'as ye sow, so shall ye reap.' And when I'm doing this, I know I'm storing up comfort for my old age."

"And if you don't live till then," amended Nora, "you've made for yourself a bed in Heaven."

Then chirruping as merrily as a bevy of English sparrows—it takes but little to make the very old as well as the very young happy—in trooped the guests, who, after shaking hands in the most dignified manner with Mrs. Dodd and Mrs. Wells, ranged themselves about the room.

Peter Rawdon's peppermints were at once portioned out, and soon all were munching joyfully, listening with keen appreciation to Miss Sally Sloane—she had at especial request brought her

accordion—as she rendered with spirit, “The Spanish Cavalier,” and followed it up with, “How the Waters Came Down at Lodore.”

The last had almost a personal interest, for Miss Sally had once known a man who knew another man who really did know the man who made it up.

Next Mrs. Ford, who had been first soprano in one of Torbolton’s churches forty years before, piped in thin sweet old treble, “My own mama, my dear mama,” and each one of the audience joined in the refrain:

“To-morrow night at candle-light, my own mama I’ll see!”

and each of the faded old eyes grew moist, while all felt that Mrs. Dodd expressed the general sentiment as, dabbing her eyes with her handkerchief, she said:

“We want our mas at eighty just as bad as we did at eight.”

But away with melancholy! Under Miss Sally Sloane’s skillful touch shrilled forth the notes of “Yankee Doodle,” and each old foot was soon jigging it or would have been if some had not had to favor lame knees, while Mrs. Dodd kept time with such energy that she almost shook off her “gold bows.”

To crown the festivity, old Mrs. Farwell, ninety-one her last birthday, helpless in body but ac-

tive in mind, spoke her piece, "The Nightingale and the Glowworm," the piece learned and recited in the log schoolhouse, away down in the District of Maine, more than eighty years before, and urged on by the applause, valiantly began the ballad:

Young Lindenshield
On bloody field
Died with disgrace
To all his race—

His uncle's name was Granger and he killed him, that's all I know!"

Perhaps it was just as well, for now the door opened, and in walked Miss Timpkins, beaming as she cried, "Many happy returns of the day, ladies!"

And there behind her were Betty and Nora, each bearing a tray all set out with cake and ice-cream.

How good it tasted! And then the extra half hour that had been allowed was over, and it was "Good-night! Good-night!" and each of the company had departed, hugging to her breast a package, from which emanated a sweet though soapy odor.

Neither were Betty Macdonald nor Nora O'Hara forgotten; and, "There's enough to last us the rest of our natural lives. You help yourself, Miss Timpkins," exhorted Mrs. Dodd, while little Mrs. Wells, clasping her small hands in ecstasy, cried:

“O me! O my! But isn’t it perfectly gee-lorious to be able to make so many folks in the world glad you were born!”

CHAPTER III

THEIR NOBLE ANCESTORS

"The wind it doth blow
And we shall have snow!"

It was two weeks since the birthday celebration; the unwontedly balmy weather of the early winter had given place to dreary skies and biting frosts, and Mrs. Dodd, gazing out upon the leaden clouds driven by a fierce northeaster athwart King Philip's Bay, uttered the prediction gloomily, while Mrs. Wells, sitting opposite her roommate, remarked:

"Good day to stay put inside builded walls like we do, Sereny." A moment later she leaned forward and stared from the window, exclaiming, "For pity's sake, if there ain't your niece Lyddy from over to Holt a-tripping it through the gate!"

"In the very face and eyes of a blizzard!" groaned Mrs. Dodd.

"Well, Lyddy's young," soothed Mrs. Wells. "I 'spect you did the same thing at her age, Sereny."

The front door banged, there were steps on the stairs, and Miss Lydia Barron was greeting, "How do, Mrs. Wells? How do, Aunt Serena?"

"'Most froze, ain't you, Lyddy?" questioned

Mrs. Dodd. "You'd better hug right up to that radiator."

"No, thank you, aunty," responded Miss Barron. "It *is* a little cold, but I don't mind that." She seated herself, and producing a notebook and pencil, explained:

"I've come after a little information. Everyone out our way is studying genealogy and I've caught the fever. What was my grandma's maiden name, Aunt Serena?"

Mrs. Dodd stared. "What was your grandma's maiden name!" she burst forth. "My sainted ma's maiden name!"

"Not Grandma McGay," protested Miss Barron. "Wasn't I christened Lydia Graham for her? It's father's mother I'm talking about."

"Oh! Why she was Thyrzy Willard."

"I know my grandma's maiden name," piped up little Mrs. Wells, eagerly. "She was a Whitney, Etruria Whitney, and she married my grandsir, Job Rand, he was old Southington Rand's grandson—you ain't forgot about him, Sereny, your Boldwood's ma was a Rand—and my ma, Anna Rand, married John Bray, so I was Samanthy Bray, and I married Absalom Wells, and his ma—"

"That's very interesting," broke in Miss Barron, gently but decisively. "Now, Aunt Serena, what was Grandpa McGay's mother's maiden name?"

"You've got me stumped on that all right,

Lyddy," chuckled Mrs. Dodd. "But I calc'late it's just as my Boldwood used to say, that tain't necessary to know everything in all creation, provided you know where to look for it. And Sereny Dodd, she doos!"

She wheeled about in her big Boston "rocker," and opening a pink satin-striped box on the top of her bureau, took out a time-yellowed manuscript, declaring:

"Away back in the fifties, my Grandma McGay, your great-grandma, her first name was Easter, had a bad fall, and whilst she was getting over it, her family took turns amusing her by putting down on paper all she could remember about when she was a little girl, ampersand. Here 'tis!" Mrs. Dodd began:

"In the year 1794 my father received for his services during the Revolutionary War—he fought clear through from Bunker Hill to Yorktown—a grant of eight hundred acres in the then District of Maine, one hundred for himself and one hundred apiece for each of his seven boys.' "

"Where'd the girls come in?" asked little Mrs. Wells, anxiously.

"Didn't come in at all," retorted Mrs. Dodd. "Neither grandma nor one of her six sisters got an ioty of all them acres! Just a good setting-out when they were married off,—feather beds, all the linen and wool they could spin and weave, and a dozen silver teaspoons,—but Great-aunt Keziah, who never was married off and consequent

got no setting-out, lived around among her brothers and brothers-in-law, nussing, washing, mending, tending babies, and not s'posed to earn neither her salt nor her sugar, poor dear creature. I tell you, Lyddy," Mrs. Dodd wagged her curly white head solemnly, "twas parlous tough times for single spinsters in them days!"

Miss Barron laughed comfortably. "I dare say," she admitted. "But any names, aunty? That's what I'm after."

"'My father was Price Llewellyn,' " resumed Mrs. Dodd.

"Price Llewellyn," repeated Miss Barron. Her pencil flew over the page of the notebook. "Then great-grandma was Easter Llewellyn."

"Naterally!" Mrs. Dodd's tone was somewhat crisp. "'He married Delindy May—' "

"Delinda May," interrupted Miss Barron. "Wait a second, aunty, till I get that down."

But Mrs. Dodd's patience was exhausted. Petulantly she restored the manuscript to the pink satin-striped box, and thrust the latter toward Miss Barron.

"Here, Lyddy Barron! You take it and keep it till you've picked out all them names you're so ferce about!"

"Thank you so much, Aunt Serena!" cried her niece. "It's splendid of you to let me have it." And with a gay, "I'll be round again to-morrow morning," Miss Lydia Barron blithely marched forth into the gray day where, to prove Mrs.

Dodd a true prophet, a few stinging snowflakes were fluttering earthward.

Soon the storm increased, one could not see across the avenue for its density, and there was raging what Torbolton's old sailor folk call a "living gale," with, according to *The Rising Sun*, "telephone and telegraph wires down in all directions and electric car service thoroughly demoralized."

But by midnight, the snow had ceased to fall, the hurricane had blown itself out, and it was a calm white world upon which Mrs. Dodd and Mrs. Wells looked, when, after breakfast, they seated themselves at their respective windows to survey the scene.

"Not a car running," asserted Mrs. Wells, with fearful joy, "don't believe Lyddy'll be here to-day." But Mrs. Dodd was lifting a warning finger.

"I hear one afar off," she announced.

Sure enough, presently, slowly clanging along the rails, came a car, "first one over the route." It halted before the Home, and a tall bundled-up figure alighted and began to plough its way up the broad path, and Mrs. Dodd and Mrs. Wells gasped in chorus:

"Lyddy Barron!"

And Mrs. Dodd vaunted, "McGay spunk there all right!"

Miss Barron was aglow with enthusiasm as she entered the southwest front corner room of the

Home. "O aunty," she exclaimed. "I stopped at the library yesterday, and hunted through books and books and books, and at last in one of them it said that Price Llewellyn was—" she paused impressively.

"Was what, Lyddy?" faltered Mrs. Dodd. "Maybe you'd best not hunt no further, Lyddy! Let sleeping dogs lie still if they will, is my motto; though far's I know, our forebears was respectable—"

"'Tisn't that," Miss Barron said, smiling loftily. "Dear me! Any one can be respectable, but we are royal! Price Llewellyn was descended from Edward the First, King of England, Scotland, Ireland, a part of France and Conqueror of Wales!"

Mrs. Dodd blinked. "Are you sure, Lyddy? There ain't to my knowledge ever been any Edwardses in the family; not but there is awful nice Edwardses, the preacher Jonathan—"

"It wouldn't have been Edwards, anyway," interposed Miss Barron. "If we'd been lucky enough to have been in the male line 'twould have been Plantagenet, but as 'tis, we're descended from a daughter, her brother was first Prince of Wales, and her son's daughter's son's daughter married a Llewellyn and emigrated to America. That's all I've found out, but I'm going straight to the library now and I'll keep you posted. Good-by, good-by!"

As the door closed behind Miss Barron, little Mrs. Wells beamed radiantly.

"You ain't an idee how tickled I be, Sereny! I never darst to let on before for it seemed zif I must be turrible stuck-up, but my Grandma Bray's great-grandma was a noble English lady, daughter of a noble English earl who ran away with a humble forester of Epworth Heath, and fled over here and learned to milk the cows and churn the butter with her own fair hands."

"That's fine!" condescended Mrs. Dodd. "Then you and me are sort of on equal terms, though of course my royal grandpa, Edward the first, King of England, Scotland, Ireland, a part of France and Conqueror of Wales, *also* the father of the first Prince of Wales—I'll get Lyddy to track out how near kin I am to this one soon's she can—is," complacently, "a cut higher!"

"But," objected little Mrs. Wells, hurriedly, "you ain't heerd all yet, Sereny! Grandma Bray's other grandma's pa was Lord High Sheriff of Salisbury Plain or Cathedral—Grandma Bray never *could* recollect which—and he sailed all to oncet with his eight apprentices, eleven children and his true and loving wife, each of 'em with a belt of red gold buckled around their waists."

"What become of all that red gold?" demanded Mrs. Dodd, excitedly, and little Mrs. Wells, waving her small hands to and fro, answered, "It went, it went! Here a little and there a little!"

Mrs. Dodd nodded with perfect comprehension.

"Boldwood's folks were just like that, too. Owned the entire shore from Pint Judy to the Pier, and whenever they honed for a fur overcoat or a summer at Saratogy, off they'd sell a slice of the water-front, till behold, the whole cake was et up and not a crumb left for my Boldwood!"

"After me, the deluge!" remarked Mrs. Wells. "Still things always might be worsen. For instance, I ain't never had a chance to discourse free about my noble ancestors before. Absalom's topnotchest was only Town Sergeant of Hartford, and if I mentioned just real keerless-like about my noble lady grandma or my grandpa, Lord High Sheriff of Salisbury Plain or Cathedral—Grandma Bray never *could* recollect which—he'd grit his teeth and glare out of the window, even if the blinds were shut and the curtains pulled clean down to the sill. My poor Absalom! That was the one and only unkind thing he ever done!"

But Mrs. Dodd, surveying her rosy old countenance in the mirror, was murmuring, rapturously, "My royal grandpa! Edward the First, King of England, Scotland, Ireland, a part of France and Conqueror of Wales, *also* father of the first Prince of Wales! Guess I'll coax Lyddy to seek out the old gentleman's picter. 'Twould be some pleasing if it turned out I favored him!"

"So 'twould," agreed Mrs. Wells, and in sweet converse upon the congenial topic, the next few hours passed quickly.

It was four o'clock in the afternoon when a message was brought that someone wished to see Mrs. Wells in the lower hall. Presently the little woman returned, carrying a basket, and at her heels, Betty Macdonald, proclaiming:

"Special delivery for Mrs. Dodd!"

As the maid retired, Mrs. Dodd said, gayly, "It's from Lyddy! Like enough she's unairthed another batch of peers and peeresses!" She tore open the envelope and read aloud:

"DEAR AUNT SERENA: It seems upon further investigation that there were two Price Llewellyns, both alive at the same time in the same township, and both very nearly the same age, one marrying Delinda May, the other Hannah Unknown. The Price Llewellyn who was descended from Edward the First, King of England, Scotland, Ireland, a part of France and Conqueror of Wales—"

Mrs. Dodd rolled the titles upon her tongue.

"Being also, as perhaps you may recall, the father of the first Prince of Wales, was not—"

"N-o-t," spelled Mrs. Dodd, perplexedly.

"Was not our grandfather, Price Llewellyn, who married Delinda May, but the other one who married Hannah Unknown—"

For a long moment Mrs. Dodd eyed the letter incredulously; then, throwing it down, she muttered, in wrathful accents:

"I don't care! I don't care a leather button! Samantha! Samantha!" She addressed her companion. "The balloon's bust! Squashed like a puff-ball! And Sereny Dodd's of noble blood no more!"

Little Mrs. Wells gazed back at her roommate from mournful soft blue eyes.

"Neither am I, Sereny," she dolorously affirmed. "'Twas my nephew, Peter Rawdon, wanted me downstairs. He fetched me these Sheldon pears—said they was just in their prime now—and I up and bragged a mite, just a teeny-weeny mite, Sereny, about my noble ancestors. And Peter, he said, just as affable, as affable, but *firm*, that if he was me, he wouldn't bank any on it, that noble ladies never, never run away with humble foresters of Epworth Heath, that it must have been a fairy tale that Grandma Bray was relating, only I was too little to realize.

"And as for the Lord High Sheriff of Salisbury Plain or Cathedral—Grandma Bray never *could* recollect which—Peter Rawdon," Mrs. Wells enunciated very slowly and with quivering lips, "he said he—had—his—doubts!" The little woman sighed. "I tell you what, Sereny Dodd, I'm going to miss my noble lady grandma and my grandpa, Lord High Sheriff of Salisbury Plain or Cathedral—Grandma Bray never *could* recollect which—after cherishing them in secret all these years!"

"And me, my royal grandpa, Edward the First,

King of England, Scotland, Ireland, a part of France and Conqueror of Wales!" lamented Mrs. Dodd. "Howsomever, I didn't have him long enough to get so awful much attached to him, and as the proverb is, 'There's no great loss 'thout some small gain.' And though we've lost an earl, a lord high sheriff and a king betwixt us, still you've gained a whole basketful of fruit—half a peck, I calc'late, 'cording to its looks,—and you know what's printed on our calendar for to-day:

Kind hearts are more than coronets.

Let's prove it! S'posen you spunk up, Samanthy, and step out and invite in the other ladies and treat us all around to a Sheldon pear!"

CHAPTER IV

MRS. DODD RISES EARLY

THE dawn of a cold February morning was approaching, and the snow glittered palely on Torbolton's seven hills under the rays of the waning moon. King Philip's Bay was frozen from shore to shore, save where a dark streak of water indicated the channel kept open for the bay craft by a bumptious little tug that snorted importantly to and fro every hour. Upon Quinton Hill the milk wagons had begun their rounds. One halted at the Home gate, and the driver, springing out, dashed around the path, set down the wire rack of bottles and scurried back to his horses shouting, "Giddap! giddap!"

The stentorian adjuration floated up through the open windows of the southwest front corner room of the Home and Mrs. Serena Dodd stirred, opened her black eyes sleepily, yawned and dozed off again. Soon there were cautious tiptoeings along the corridor and the lower part of the house began to waken into life. Nora O'Hara clattered the covers of the kitchen range, Betty Macdonald vigorously whirled the handle of the coffee-mill, and the college boy, who "tends the furnace," stamped the snow from his boots on the outside porch. A moment later he had marched down

the cellar stairs and was crashing wide the drafts of the heater, and once more Mrs. Dodd was aroused from her slumbers. She sniffed the keen air disapprovingly, and peering over the edge of the bedclothes at her roommate peacefully sleeping in her little white cot, scolded under her breath:

"Ought by rights to make Samanthy Wells get up and shut them windows! Massy knows 'tain't me that's honing for *all* the fresh air that's going. Howsomever," relentingly, "my Boldwood always said, 'O sleep, thou art a sacred thing!' And I guess—" She crept from between the sheets and shivering across the floor quietly lowered the windows, and hastening back to bed, snuggled down under the blankets to await the warming of the room of which the punkety-punk of the radiators—an innovation since Mr. Horace Wimbles's time—was giving liberal promise.

At length the grandfather's clock on the landing, the clock, above whose dial limned in gold upon a sky of azure were the sun, the moon, the planets, and most of the lesser constellations, chimed melodiously, "One, two, three, four! One, two, three, four!" and Mrs. Dodd murmured:

"Half past six! It's warm's toast now. Mebbe," joyously, "Sereny Dodd'll have time to lay out her African if she gets up immejiate." So saying, she stepped out upon the rug at her bedside.

She moved slowly and another quarter sounded while she was dressing, and as she completed the

making of her bed by patting her pillow into place, the fourth quarter rang out followed by the striking of seven o'clock. Then the Japanese gong in the lower hall pealed loudly under the manipulation of the capable hands of the matron, and little Mrs. Wells's soft blue eyes flew wide to regard Mrs. Dodd amazedly.

"O me! O my!" she exclaimed, "Ain't you awful smart rising it up while it is yet night, the way you must have to be all clothed and in your right mind like that. But, Sereny," as her gaze fell on Mrs. Dodd's bed all made up, "Miss Timpkins won't like it worth one copper cent your making up your bed 'thout airing it longer!"

"Don't approve of it myself in a general way, Samantha," acknowledged Mrs. Dodd, "but," with dignity, "this morning's diffrent. There's good and excellent reasons. And," a trace of acerbity in her tones, "if Miss Maria Timpkins ain't informed by no one—"

"She won't be informed by me," protested Mrs. Wells, "if that's what you're hinting at, Sereny!"

"Well, I s'pose not, Samantha," admitted Mrs. Dodd, "but the fact is I calc'late to lay out my stripes afore breakfast! You know I bound off the last one yesterday so my African is finished complete all but sewing it together and crocheting a scalloped aidge along both ends and I'm going to taykle that to-day."

Knitting was Mrs. Dodd's favorite occupation, and when, "away back in the fall," Mrs. Orlando

Waldron, the president of the board of managers, had asked, "Wouldn't you like to knit me an afghan?" Mrs. Dodd had answered with fervor:

"'Deed and 'deed and double 'deed would I, ma'am! Only," pleadingly, "don't send me none of them fady art-and-stick-to-it colors! They ain't no thing of beauty nor joy forever to Sereny Dodd. She," with conviction, "deespises 'em!"

And the gay-hued rolls that Mrs. Dodd now produced from the bureau drawer and spread out one by one on the white counterpane showed that Mrs. Waldron had respected Mrs. Dodd's taste in the matter.

She surveyed the seven stripes laid out before her and affirmed, happily, "Sereny Dodd doos just love that scarlet and canary yellow and salmon pink and the orange, and though," hesitatingly, "the blue and the green and the purple wouldn't never been her real ch'ice, I s'pose they ain't to be sneezed at!"

"They're all elegant," exulted little Mrs. Wells who had slipped from her white cot and was hurriedly scrambling into her clothes, "and you're going to let me help you harmonize 'em, ain't you, Sereny? And I'll thread all the needles for you, worsted 'em, I 'spect I ought to say," she giggled, "can't I, Sereny? For that won't prevent your claiming you done every individooal stitch with your own ten fingers and thumbs!"

Mrs. Dodd nodded smiling acquiescence, and presently, the Japanese gong again reverberating

through the house, the two women trudged down the stairs.

"Somehow or 'nother," asserted Mrs. Dodd, reflectively, as she languidly put one pudgy foot before the other, "seem zif I felt turrible logy to-day!"

Little Mrs. Wells contemplated the speaker, then remarked:

"I'm kind of half impressed myself, Sereny, that mebbe you're putting on flesh. Don't you think," she hazarded, "that p'raps you're eating a leetle, just a leetle too much? You might begin by leaving off something each day. F'rinstance, it's baked apple and cream morning. You might eat the apple 'thout the cream."

"I might," concurred Mrs. Dodd, "to be sure, I might, but," she swung around the newel post on the first floor and started eagerly for the dining-room, "I guess I won't begin to-day."

It was evening, and at the striking of the hour of nine, Mrs. Dodd avowed, wearily:

"What 'twixt harmonizing all them colors and the opinions of everybody in all creation, Sereny Dodd's tired 'most to death and will retire instanter."

"So'll I, Sereny," agreed Mrs. Wells, and five minutes after, being a nimble little body, she was settled in her bed, interestedly watching her roommate's more deliberate movements.

Mrs. Dodd took off her cap and laid it on the bureau, and unpinning her breastpin, thrust it into

the cushion. Removing the counterpane, she folded it and placed it on a chair, turned down blankets and sheet and reached under her pillow for her nightdress. It was not there. She lifted the pillow and felt vaguely over the surface beneath it, but in vain.

"Where's my nightgown?" she questioned, bewilderedly.

"Why, I don't know," answered Mrs. Wells. "Isn't it under your pillow?"

"No, and if you've taken it for a joke—" fumed Mrs. Dodd.

"Of course I haven't. I guess you made it up in your bed this morning."

"Oh, so I might." Mrs. Dodd stripped down the clothes from the couch, but the missing article did not appear.

"Look under the mattress," suggested Mrs. Wells. "Don't you remember the day you turned your petticoat under the mattress?"

"I didn't turn it at all to-day. I was in such a hurry," confessed Mrs. Dodd.

She began to spread up the clothes and Mrs. Wells sprang out of bed, saying, "Let me take one side. It doesn't seem, Sereny," she smiled, "zif you got ahead much making this up 'fore breakfast."

The rules of the house were, "Lights out and inmates in bed at nine-thirty." It was now ten minutes later, and Miss Timpkins stood at the door.

"What's the matter?" she asked.

Mrs. Dodd did not speak, but Mrs. Wells, who had jumped into bed again, explained, "She's lost her nightgown!"

"Nonsense," cheerfully responded Miss Timpkins, "you couldn't lose your nightgown in one room like this." She picked up the pillow, looked under it and into it, and with vigorous hand stripped the bed, saying, "You've made it up in the bed."

Mrs. Dodd parted her lips, but Mrs. Wells shook her head warningly.

"Maybe you've turned it under your mattress, just as you did your petticoat last month," pursued the matron, briskly throwing over the mattress.

"I—" began Mrs. Dodd, but another look from her roommate kept her silent.

"Well, it isn't around your bed surely," announced Miss Timpkins, and she gazed upward as if expecting to see it on the ceiling.

"You haven't got it on, have you, Mrs. Wells?" she queried. "Probably," with an accent of relief, "you've got Mrs. Dodd's on, and yours is under your pillow."

"Me, Miss Timpkins!" remonstrated Mrs. Wells. "It takes four yards to make me a nightgown, and it takes ten for Sereny. Look!" she once more jumped from her bed and held her nightdress out as a little girl does her frock at dancing school. "Don't you want to pull my

bed to pieces?" she asked, with mild sarcasm.

"Why, yes," said Miss Timpkins, "that's a good idea," and she promptly acted upon it to Mrs. Wells's rather indignant amazement, but without results.

"It was one of my two new ones," lamented Mrs. Dodd. "My niece Lyddy from over to Holt sent it to me for Christmas. They was trimmed with torchon, the first ones I ever had trimmed with torchon!" she wailed.

"What's going on?" called Miss Sally Sloane, hastening from her room across the hall.

"Mrs. Dodd has lost her nightgown," replied Miss Timpkins.

"Was it one of those your niece Lyddy give you?" asked Miss Sloane.

"Yes, it was," sobbed Mrs. Dodd, "all trimmed with torchon!"

"I think," interposed the matron, "we won't hunt any more to-night. You'd better get a clean one. We'll find the other to-morrow."

"But I don't want to put on a clean one," objected Mrs. Dodd. "I always wear my nightgowns week and week about, and if I get on a clean one now, it will mix me all up so's I shan't know which from 'tother."

"But what will you do?" gently inquired Miss Timpkins.

"I don't know," said Mrs. Dodd and wailed afresh.

"I tell you what," offered good-natured Sally

Sloane, "I'll lend her one of my nice print bed-gowns. I've got an extra supply." And she waddled away.

"I never wore a print bedgown in all my life!" rebelled Mrs. Dodd.

"There has to be a first time to everything, Mrs. Dodd," said Miss Timpkins, soothingly. "And Miss Sally's the only lady in the house that has one that will fit, and I don't see what else you can do if you don't wish to get your own clean one. Now you undo your waist and I'll slip off your shoes and stockings."

Mrs. Dodd fumbled awkwardly at the hooks and eyes of her bodice, and Miss Timpkins, straightening up a few minutes later to assist the old fingers, commented, pleasantly:

"Why, Mrs. Dodd! You're stouting up! We'll have to see about a new waist for you before long." And Mrs. Dodd, brightening, declared:

"It's all in the contract, 'Boarded and lodged and suitably clothed.'"

Miss Timpkins threw back the waist upon Mrs. Dodd's plump shoulders, then pulled it off her still plumper arms. She halted staring, but after a second's delay, proceeded to unfasten Mrs. Dodd's skirts and dropped them on the floor.

"I guess you can get right into bed," said she, and there was a note of repressed amusement in her voice.

Mrs. Dodd plucked confusedly at throat and wrists and crept between the sheets without utter-

ing a word. Miss Timpkins gathered up the old lady's apparel and laid it across a chair, and called, "Never mind the gown, Miss Sloane. Mrs. Dodd doesn't need it, after all. Good-night, Mrs. Wells. Good-night, Mrs. Dodd!" She turned out the light and left the room.

As the door closed Mrs. Wells rose noiselessly up in bed and in tones of rapturous comprehension exclaimed, "O Sereny Dodd, you've had your nightgown on all day!"

CHAPTER V

MRS. DODD'S TREASURE

It was a quiet day at the Home; not a Sunday, for then the minister would have been downstairs giving his Sabbath-day talk, and the glee-club from the college on the hill singing "Coronation" or "Jerusalem the Golden"; not a board-meeting day; not a visiting day; not a holiday; no, not even the day for bringing up the clean clothes, which made some sort of a diversion; but just a plain, ordinary, everyday week-day in early March, the betwixt and between time with just nothing going on! And Mrs. Dodd sighed heavily:

"I wish to goodness I'd made that African last longer, Samantha! How I do miss it!" She yawned sleepily and complained, "It certain is awful dull, awful, awful dull!" and little Mrs. Wells, pottering about, agreed, amiably:

"Terrible, Sereny, terrible!"

A moment later there was a crash. Mrs. Wells uttered a faint scream, while Mrs. Dodd, forgetful of her drowsiness, bounced forward in her big Boston "rocker," exclaiming:

"For pity's sake, Samantha Wells, can't I take my eye off of you for one teeny quarter of half a second 'thout you be up to some caper?"

She paused, then burst forth again, as she beheld fragments of gay-hued china scattered upon the floor, "My soap-dish cover! My white chiny soap-dish cover, with the yellow buttercups painted on it and a green and gold bow-knot for a handle that my Boldwood's grandma presented me down in the old South County, the year him and me was married, and—" wildly,— "you've smashed it! Oh, dear, dear, dear, I'd rather paid two million dollars in silver square out of my best black silk pocket than had it happen! What you done it for?"

"I didn't mean to!" wailed Mrs. Wells. "O Sereny, I didn't mean to!"

"Do you recollect what Mrs. Didn't-mean-to done once?" demanded Mrs. Dodd, her voice sinking to abysmal depths. "She clim to the top shelf of the closet and borried her pa-in-law's razor to cut buttonholes with!"

"You'd never known if I hadn't told you," reproached Mrs. Wells. "But 'twas me. I don't deny it. And my new ashes-of-roses Irish poplin, and it cut 'em just elegant! But I ain't an idee to this day and hour how Pa Wells come to suspicion it!"

"'Twas peculiar," commented Mrs. Dodd, dryly. "But," raising her tones in high indignation, "that ain't neither here nor there! What I'm asking is, 'What you done it for?'"

"Highly-tighty!" reproved Miss Sally Sloane, attracted from her room by the hubbub. "What's

the matter, Mrs. Dodd? What you pitching into Mrs. Wells so for?"

"She's been and gone and broke my soap-dish cover, that's what's the matter!" gustily proclaimed Mrs. Dodd.

"Shucks!" derided Miss Sloane. "I presumed from the way you was carrying on that 'twas something worth while."

"I guess you'd presume 'twas something worth while," retorted Mrs. Dodd, "if your husband's grandma had give you a white chiny toilet-set all painted over with yellow buttercups and green and gold bow-knots for handles, and that soap-dish cover was the one lorn piece you'd got left out of the whole caboodle, and you'd lugged it from pillow to post more'n forty-leven times—the one thing," impressively, "I always moved by hand—and now Samanthy Wells has up and smashed it to smithereens, and won't even own up what she done it for! There used to be a cake of 'Spicy Breezes' soap that come with it, but I ain't onreasonable. I expect some things to take to themselves wings and fly away, but soap-dish covers, soap-dish covers with yellow buttercups painted on 'em and green and gold bow-knots for handles, never, no, never!"

"It slipped," quavered Mrs. Wells. "I was just a-dusting it and it slipped." She threw her apron over her head, and from behind it issued soft weeping.

"I'm proper sorry for you both," sympathized

Miss Sloane. "Still we'd ought to be thankful for what blessings we've got, and one of them is that Mr. Dodd's poor old grandma ain't here to view the destruction."

Mrs. Wells peeped around the frill of her apron. "She wa'n't old," she protested. "She was only our age when she passed away if we live to our next birthday, wa'n't she, Sereny? And her hair was as black as a coal, not a white spear in it, was there, Sereny? She must've been a turrible hahnsome lady, and your Boldwood, he favored his grandma a sight, I've often heerd you say so, Sereny."

But Mrs. Dodd, not to be propitiated, only stared stonily into space, and again Miss Sloane took up the gauntlet.

"'Tennyrate, there ain't no woe but there is worsen," she averred. "And s'posen," her gaze wandered about the room, upward to the ceiling, downward to the floor, "s'posen," solemnly, "it'd been Mrs. Wells's little toe!"

"My suzzy me!" squealed Mrs. Wells, agitatedly hopping from one foot to the other. "Which one, Miss Sloane? Which one?"

"Well," defied Mrs. Dodd, "s'posen, s'posen!"

Mrs. Wells gasped. Miss Sloane's honest gray eyes grew big with shocked amazement. "Come away, Mrs. Wells," she adjured, in hushed accents, "come away. Let us leave her and her cruel thoughts together."

With the mien of an offended duchess, a very

round and chubby duchess, Miss Sloane swept from the room, and Mrs. Wells, gathering up the broken china, cast one furtive glance backward and followed in Miss Sloane's wake.

"Go then, stay then, never come back again!" called Mrs. Dodd, stormily, after them. The door shut gently; Mrs. Dodd was alone.

For a few minutes she rocked violently to and fro, muttering disjointed scraps of sentences; presently she became silent, her color faded, and grasping the footboard of the bed, she drew herself to her feet, and trudging to the bureau, opened the upper drawer. She returned to her chair and outspread upon her lap a large flat white flour-bag, wadded and perfumed as a sachet. In one corner was an immense bow of pink satin ribbon and below was outlined with pink floss and in a somewhat tipsy fashion:

May we never roam
Far from home
And each other!

"It was her first Christmas gift to me," she murmured, smoothing out the sachet bag tenderly. "Her very first! And I've been that ch'ice of it, that I've kept it wropped up in tissue-paper and tied about with pink baby ribbon just as I hauled it out of my stocking that Christmas morning." She sniffed unhappily. "To think that Samanthy Wells would up and quarrel with me in my

declining years, and go off with a strange woman!"

Once more she rose, and with a tragic gesture thrust the sachet bag back in the drawer, and resuming her seat, went on lugubriously, "What's forty white chiny soap-dish covers with eighty sprays of buttercups painted on 'em and—and—twice eighty green and gold bow-knot handles compared with upsetting Samantha Wells's peace and happiness! An old soap-dish cover that wouldn't sell at auction for a sou-markee!" The tears trickled down her plump cheeks, her double chin quivered, and she groaned aloud, "Always sinning! Always repenting! That's Sereny Dodd!"

The afternoon wore on, the clock on the landing chimed, "One, two, three, four! One two, three, four! One, two, three, four!" then solemnly boomed, "One, two, three, four, five, six!" Mrs. Dodd drew a long breath. "Well, I guess it's all over now. She's gone, Samantha's gone! Probably she's told Miss Timpkins she can't stand Sereny Dodd's temper no longer!"

But just then she heard the patter of footsteps, the door flew wide, and Mrs. Wells entered. Behind her was the brilliantly lighted corridor, but the room was very dark, and she halted, exclaiming:

"O me! O my! Sereny Dodd! Ain't you turned on the 'lectricity yet?"

She pulled the dangling chain beside the door, and the light fell on an object of splendor borne aloft in one hand. "Ain't it bee-yutiful?" she rejoiced, "Ain't it perfectly lovely?"

Then perceiving her roommate's tear-stained face, Mrs. Wells gingerly placed the soap-dish cover upon the wash-stand, and hastened towards Mrs. Dodd, crying, "Why-ee, Sereny! What ails you?"

"You," gulped Mrs. Dodd, "you went off with Sally Sloane!"

"I never!" contradicted Mrs. Wells. "I never! I walked out of the door behind Sally Sloane, but I went straight to Miss Timpkins, and she and me've been fixing your soap-dish cover ever since! We had to wait 'tween whiles for the gum-stickum to dry, but there 'tis, solid's Roger Williams's Rock! You couldn't find a crack in it if you put on both pairs of your glasses and I lent you mine into the bargain! Ain't you glad, Sereny?"

"I be glad! I be glad at everything you do, Samanthy!" rejoined Mrs. Dodd, humbly. "Maybe I don't always act so, but Sereny Dodd's a poor creetur, a-making good resolutions and a-breaking good resolutions till sometimes she's so disapp'inted in herself seem zif she should die!"

"There, there!" cooed Mrs. Wells, patting her roommate's shoulder. "I ain't minding. I knew 'twas just from the mouth out. Hark!" The

Japanese gong was pealing from the lower hall. "Listen to that! It's hollering, 'Supper's on the table, Sereny and Samanthy!'" She clasped Mrs. Dodd's pudgy hands with her own small ones. "Let's accept the invitation. A bite to eat and a nice hot cup of tea won't do neither of us no harm. We've had a trying afternoon, though," her mild blue eyes twinkled quizzically, "not quite so dull as you and me calc'lated on, hey, Sereny?"

CHAPTER VI

THE SCARLET CHINA CRAPE SHAWL

MARCH had been a wild and stormy month, with rain and sleet and snow, and snow and sleet and rain and always the blustering breezes; but now had dawned a sunny windless morning, and Mrs. Dodd averred:

“Roared in like a mountain lion, whooped and yelled ever since, but here ’tis the thirty-first, and the month’s going out gentle’s Mary’s little lamb. Guess our Betty’ll have a good day to start off on, after all.”

Little Mrs. Wells nodded. Yes, it was true. Betty Macdonald, having served five years in the land flowing with milk and honey, the land prosaically termed “the States,” was about to take flight to distant Pictou for a short visit.

All the Home people were so interested. Miss Timpkins had changed the maid’s savings into gold, adding, as grateful Betty had informed each member of the household, a “whole entire extra week’s wages.” Mrs. Demeter Ford had constructed a money-bag of chamois to hang about Betty’s neck; old Mrs. Farwell had bestowed from her very few possessions six stereopticon views of Bangor, Maine, and little Mrs. Wells, sticking the last one of the pins into the pin-ball destined as

her own parting gift to Betty, grieved inwardly:

"Everyone is presenting Betty with a keepsake—everyone but Sereny." And unable to restrain herself longer, the little woman cried, "Sereny Dodd, ain't you got anything for a present for Betty Macdonald?"

Mrs. Dodd fixed startled black eyes upon her roommate. A moment later, she rejoined, composedly:

"I've been thinking, Samantha Wells."

She pulled out the drawer of the light-stand before her, extracted from within a small flat package and snapped the string. As she proceeded to reveal the contents, Mrs. Wells gasped:

"O me! O my! You ain't ever meaning to give away your scarlet Chiny crape shawl, Sereny Dodd!"

And again Mrs. Dodd rejoined, deliberately:

"I've been thinking."

"I always did declare 'twas the splndidest thing I ever did see." Mrs. Wells reached forward and touched the delicate glowing fabric with caressing finger-tips. "Why, it's sheer as one of them Injy muslins old deep-sea Captain Rymer used to tell about, that'd go through your wedding ring!"

"This one went through a napkin ring oncet," affirmed Mrs. Dodd. "All but the fringe. My Boldwood was a master hand at trying things and 'twas him that done it. Not but once, though," grimly, "I seen to that!"

Little Mrs. Wells, still gloating over the silken folds, hazarded, "It must have cost a mort of money."

"Like enough, first off," acknowledged Mrs. Dodd, indifferently, "though it never cost me naught but worry." She settled back in her chair and continued, "I'll tell you all about it. This shawl has a hist'ry. My husband, Boldwood Dodd, picked it up in the Public Gardens down to Boston. He'd traveled down there to buy stock for the shop, one pound of horse-shoe nails,—I don't imagine he saved one copper Canady penny by it, but he enj'yed the journey and I didn't object,—and whilst he was eating his lunch, he spied between the rails at the back of the bench this shawl on the ground. He fished through and hauled it up and spread it out beside him to dry, for 'twas all damp with the dew. He stayed there more'n an hour, but there wa'n't a soul come nigh. So when he'd finished his snack, he lugged it over to the depot and showed it to the telegraph operator; he was a Torbolton boy, and Boldwood was well acquainted with him. And—I don't s'pose the shawl did appear much account then, all wisped up and draggled—he said, 'Fling it away. 'Tain't worth bothering about.'

"But Boldwood knew better'n to do that and he brought it home to me, and after I'd cleaned it with French chalk and dipped it into naphtha and unsnarled the fringe and stretched it on my lace curtain stretcher, lo and behold, it was another

creetur! And my conscience sort of smote me, so Boldwood advertised, not straight out, but mysterious like, 'Found, an article of value. Apply, *Rising Sun* office, Box 2121.' "

"Any answers?" queried Mrs. Wells.

"Answers!" exclaimed Mrs. Dodd. "Well, I should say! Box 2121 wouldn't hold 'em! They had to set out a laundry basket to ketch the overflow! You wouldn't believe there was so many articles of value in these Torbolton Plantations as folkses sent word they'd lost. They ranged all the way from sable muffs to pieces of hand-writ po'try. But no one mentioned a scarlet Chiny crape shawl, so I kept it."

"You always did dote on red, Sereny," remarked Mrs. Wells.

"I did and I do," assented Mrs. Dodd. "But somehow or 'nother, I never got much satisfaction out of this shawl. First time I wore it to church, only time," she corrected, "Parson Burritt must have been awful ann'yed, for the entire congregation like as they was one woman just oggled my shawl! And when the meeting was over, not a child could be either coaxed or driv' into Sunday-school—they had it right after service, and the vestibule was chock-full of little boys and girls—till Sereny Dodd had fled away out of sight. And Boldwood, he set his foot down hard. But once when he was off to Boston again for a day, I donned it for the Cawcawmsquissick Chapel Picnic. And after the co-alation

was over—you know how awful thirsty you are after you've sampled ham sandwiches and sardines in mustard and the lemonade's gi'n out—Sister Whittum and me sa'ntered down the railroad track to get a drink at the Founder's Spring; and this shawl actooally stopped a train of karo-sene-oil cars. They calc'lated 'twas a blazing bonfire. And the conductor," Mrs. Dodd coughed deprecatingly, "he was a good-looking man with a black mustache, but he didn't talk real pretty."

"He'd ought to 'a' been ashamed!" declared Mrs. Wells, while Mrs. Dodd went on:

"Then I packed it away in cedar wood chips, but landee, I never walked out of that tenement if 'twa'n't no more'n around to the grocery after a quart of potatoes but my heart would go pit-a-pat for fear some burglar would climb in and steal it whilst I was gone. Howsomever," cheerily, "he never done it. And here 'tis, and I've been thinking—"

At this instant a pleasant voice greeted them from the doorway, "Good morning, ladies!"

"Come in, come in, Betty!" invited Mrs. Wells, and Mrs. Dodd, beaming a cordial welcome, observed:

"Got out my Chiny crape shawl, Betty. How do you like it?"

As the maid stepped into the room, little Mrs. Wells's countenance assumed an anxious expression. She winked at Betty, winked with vigor and with great significance, winked her left eye.

It was, discreetly enough, the eye remote from Mrs. Dodd, but unfortunately, the eye remote from Betty also, so the maid, all unconscious of the kindly warning intended, bending her attention upon the gorgeous web draping Mrs. Dodd's knees, pronounced:

"Hahnsome! Hahnsome! Dunno's I ever see anything hahnsomer. But," with a glance at the snowy, cap-surmounted hair, the wrinkled if rosy old face, and the portly figure of Mrs. Serena Dodd, "p'raps a speck, just a speck too gay."

"Gay!" ejaculated Mrs. Dodd. "Gay!"

"Yes," insisted Betty, "gay. Now if you'd rip off the fringe—"

"Rip off the fringe!" repeated Mrs. Dodd.

"And trim it up with a good deep frilling of black net footing and set in a couple of rows of insertion to match, 'twould tone it down a considerable lot."

"Tone it down!" Mrs. Dodd began to fold up the shawl; Mrs. Wells fidgeted unhappily, and Betty continued:

"Or better still, dye it."

"Dye it!" Mrs. Dodd's accents were stormy, "dye it! Dye my scarlet Chiny crape shawl my Boldwood discovered in the Public Gardens down to Boston five and twenty years ago, and fetched five and forty miles home to me! Sereny Dodd thinks not!"

Mrs. Wells, who had winked sixteen times if

she had winked once, now interrupted, desperately, "You wouldn't call it too gay if 'twas yourn, Betty?"

"Nothing's too gay for young folks," alleged Betty. "They can deck out in grass-green yellow bordered round with sky-blue pink if they feel to, being young. But for old ladies," she hesitated, for Mrs. Dodd's aspect was severe, "or for elderly ladies," gracious! that did not suit either! "or for ladies of a certain age," Betty fancied that Mrs. Dodd's features softened, and she uttered the phrase again with complacency, "for ladies of a certain age, that shawl, it can't be denied, is too gay. Now if it was mine—"

"But 'tain't!" retorted Mrs. Dodd. Bang! The light-stand drawer was shut, the scarlet China crape shawl had disappeared within, and Mrs. Dodd, rocking briskly to and fro, was apparently absorbed in rapt contemplation of the swelling buds of the horse-chestnut tree on the front lawn.

Betty stared at Mrs. Wells, Mrs. Wells stared back, murmuring under her breath, "Simple Simon!" Then aloud, with resignation, "What train do you take for Boston to-morrow, Betty?"

"The nine-thirty," replied the maid. "I've ordered the coach for nine." She broke into a joyous laugh. "I haven't rid in anything but 'lectrics since I left Pictou. 'Twill seem pretty nice."

"So 'twill," sympathized Mrs. Wells, and Mrs.

Dodd, whose wrath, always short-lived, was already cooling, admonished her:

"Don't you forget to-morrow's April Fool's Day, Betty. Be careful you don't get fooled."

"I never was fooled in all my born days," responded Betty, cheerfully.

"I've been, oodlins of times," volunteered little Mrs. Wells. "Every April Fool's Day, reg'lar's clock-work, my Absalom'd say, 'O Samanthy, see that flock of geese!' and I'd hop up from the breakfast table, and skip to the window and peek out and say, 'Where? Where?' And Absalom'd clap me on the shoulder, and holler, 'One of 'em's right here! April Fool, Samanthy Wells! Haw, haw, haw!' You could most hear him to the moon."

"Once a man, twice a child!" commented Mrs. Dodd, amiably. "Now my Boldwood's trick was, 'See that horse running away!' Horses was in his line, you know, he being a blacksmith and a proper good judge of 'em, if I say it as shouldn't. Sometimes I'd let him fool me just for fun, sometimes not." She sighed. "I've often wished since I'd let him fool me oftener. He was tickled as cuffee every identical time, and it didn't harm me an ioty."

"No man, no woman, no child ever April-fooled me!" boasted Betty, tossing her ruddy head. "No one ever can!"

Mrs. Dodd's eyes danced. "Is it a dare?" she demanded.

"Darst you! darst you!" challenged Betty.

"I never take a dare!" avowed Mrs. Dodd with spirit. "You watch out!"

April first dawned bright and beautiful; and Betty Macdonald, after scoffing merrily at mythical youngsters swinging on mythical gates and imaginary dogs chasing imaginary cats up imaginary trees, had departed in the "coach ordered for nine."

Now it was mid-afternoon, and the mail-carrier had just delivered a postal card addressed to Mrs. Serena Dodd.

"I've got on my far-sights, Samanthu," said Mrs. Dodd, passing the card to her roommate. "You read it out." And Mrs. Wells read it out:

"DEAR MRS. DODD: You done it! Thank you, ma'am. A good girl."

"'For a good girl,'" explained Mrs. Dodd, "is what I printed on the tag I fastened onto the package. She must have unairthed it on the train. 'Twas the good-by present I give her when she wa'n't expecting it no more'n Adam and Eve. Tucked it in her satchel when she was hugging old Mrs. Farwell and kind of off her guard." And at little Mrs. Wells's bewildered look, she added, in genial reproach:

"Don't you understand, Samanthu? I've April-fooled Betty Macdonald, April-fooled her good and plenty with my scarlet Chiny crape

shawl, the very same shawl my Boldwood discovered down to Boston and fetched home to me with the one pound of horse-shoe nails he'd bargained for." Mrs. Dodd was one vast expansive smile. "Didn't I tell Betty Macdonald that Sereny Dodd never takes a dare? Well, she ain't done it this time, neither!"

CHAPTER VII

MRS. DODD'S BANDBOX

It was, indeed, a short visit that Betty Macdonald made. Two days and two nights of railroad travel, a long drive across half Pictou County, joyous welcomes from everyone, presents distributed, friends and relatives visited, then two Saturdays having passed without any wages coming in but any amount of "good red gold" going out, Betty, with the "wander-lust" again in her veins, had turned her face once more toward Torbolton. And it was the morning after her arrival that Mrs. Dodd was saying:

"Just twenty days since Betty bade us farewell, and now she's back again," and as she heard the thud of the pail in the hall where Betty was beginning her task of washing windows, "Don't it seem good to hear her banging round?" She repeated, reflectively, "Twenty days, why that makes to-day the twenty-first of April. Massy sakes, Samanthy Wells! Where's my spring bun-nit? The day after the day after to-morrow 'twill have been gone two weeks. Sometimes I most mistrust 'taint *ever* coming back!"

"Tut! Tut!" chided little Mrs. Wells, "'Tain't for you or me, Sereny Dodd, to be doubting Thomases. Why—"

She was interrupted by the brisk tap-tapping of heels along the corridor. Both women glanced alertly at the door, and Mrs. Dodd said, "S'pose it's it, Samantha?"

"Likely," replied Mrs. Wells. "Likely, more'n likely, Sereny."

The next instant, Miss Timpkins stood before them, poising on uplifted fingers an affair of lace and ribbon and flowers, two ostrich tips and a steel buckle, and announced, cheerily:

"Here's Mrs. Dodd's new bonnet! Done over fine! Everything freshened up except the violets, they were too faded to use again, so I bought a brand-new spray of heliotrope straight out of the show-case."

She paused. The pleased expectant look had died out of the two old faces. Mrs. Wells cast down her blue eyes, while Mrs. Dodd studied with somber black orbs the headgear held forth for her inspection. "Where's the box?" she demanded.

"The box!" faltered the matron.

"Yes, the box. The bunnit-box. Don't they give 'em nowadays? When I used to buy my own bunnits they always come in a box. I wouldn't 've took 'em less they did." She continued in accents more of sorrow than of anger, "If you'd only brought me the box, I'd never said a word. But now I ain't nothing to conceal. I never liked them vi'lets you had my bunnit trimmed with three seasons ago, but I ain't never owned up

to nobody all these years, have I, Samanthy?"

"Not to nobody but me," concurred Mrs. Wells.

"And though," pursued Mrs. Dodd, "I was prepared, for the sake of saving the board expense, to put up with them vi'lets for a spell longer, I hated 'em. I hate purple! Lavender or laylock or morve or vi'let or heliotrope, it's all one to Sereny Dodd. Just purple, purple, purple! I despise 'em all! And moreover and to boot, in my opinion purple's too old for a lady of my age. And Samanthy thinks the same, don't you, Samanthy?"

Mrs. Wells nodded. "And for me, too," she gently observed.

"New purple flowers!" Mrs. Dodd sighed. "But I wouldn't said a word if you'd only brought me a box. I want a box awful!"

"Dear me! Dear, dear me!" murmured Miss Timpkins.

"Strange how Sereny doos love boxes," piped up Mrs. Wells. "Now I've got an idee, ma'am. Just you let me tell it. Couldn't you send the bunnit back, and have them purple flowers changed for pink ones, a rose, or a 'zalia, or a bleeding-heart? Sereny sets turrible store by pink. And if the board decides you've really got to keep the heliotrope, you might lay it aside for old Mrs. Farwell's next bunnit. But this time, Miss Timpkins, you be firm. Say you've *got* to have a box!"

She smiled entreatingly at the matron, who

smiled back, thinking, "We'll all be old ourselves sometime," and answered, good-naturedly, "Of course I can, and I will."

Mrs. Dodd's black eyes softened. "I don't like to hurt folkses' feelings, Miss Timpkins," she plaintively asserted, "not more'n the next one. But if they don't know the diffrence 'twixt seventy-nine and a hundred, somebody's got to tell 'em, and seems as if 'twas always me had to taykle them hateful jobs!"

Two days later Mrs. Dodd was gazing at her second self in the depths of the mirror and exulting, "That pink rose is perfectly lovely! O me! O my!" she sniffed rapturously. "I can e'en a'most smell it! And as for the cunning little teeny-tawnty buds on top, the Queen of Sheby in all her glory couldn't ever had anything hahnsomer!" She turned her head from side to side and bridled complacently. "Pink always was my color, always! And I will say for Miss Timpkins that if she's some slow about catching on, when she does catch on, it's with a grip like iron!"

Still beaming joyously, she stepped to the closet, took from the shelf a bandbox—a bandbox encased in a gay plaided gingham bag, a bandbox evidently of Mrs. Dodd's youth—and proceeded, to her roommate's unbounded astonishment, to place within it the new bonnet. As she carefully tucked in the tissue-paper and tied the drawing-string, Mrs. Wells found her tongue.

"Land alive, Sereny Dodd!" she gasped. "What

on airth be you going to do with that new band-box you raised such a catouse about?"

"Nothing," replied Mrs. Dodd, placidly. "Nothing. Only I ain't never real comfortable in my mind 'less I have a box on hand in case. And this one," she patted the shining white box with affection, "is grand, simply grand! Though I ain't a speck of room where to keep it. My closet's cram-jam-full." She looked tentatively toward her companion.

"Mine, too, Sereny." Mrs. Wells's voice was as determined as so gentle a voice could be. "And what's more, I've got your blanket wrapper and your best shoes in it. There ain't another inch to spare." Such gloom, however, darkened Mrs. Dodd's countenance that the little woman suggested hastily, "There's the hall closet."

Sure enough there was the hall closet; and presently Mrs. Dodd, having pushed the box out of sight under the stairs, was admonishing, "Now don't you touch it, Samanthy." And at her companion's aggrieved air, she added, significantly, "Oncet someone, naming no names, Samanthy, took my bee-yutiful gilt-aidged box my niece Lyddy from over to Holt sent me Christmas with candied fruit in it, and filled it chock-full with your nephew Peter Rawdon's chocolate creams, and presented it to old Mrs. Farwell, and I ain't ever got it back."

"O Sereny!" broke in Mrs. Wells, reproachfully. "She was turrible tickled. She ain't any Niece

Lyddy nor Nephew Peter to cocker her up, poor dear! And I told her the box was your donation, give you all the compliment, Sereny."

"Well, the deed's did," genially returned the mollified Mrs. Dodd. "And as my Boldwood used to say, 'So be it!'"

This was Thursday afternoon and on Friday morning, when Mrs. Dodd heard footsteps in the corridor, she called, "Betty! Betty Macdonald!" As Betty's ruddy head was thrust within the door, she went on, "Betty, I wisht I had a box."

"Why-ee, Sereny! You ain't forgot so quick!" cried Mrs. Wells.

Mrs. Dodd stared at her roommate coldly. "I never forget, Samantha Wells!" said she, and again, "Betty, I wisht I had a box."

"What kind of a box?" inquired Betty. "A pill box or a packing-case?"

"Neither," said Mrs. Dodd, laughing. "A betwixt and between, I guess. My work box is all falling to flinders, and I need a new one. You put your mind to it, Betty, and you're so clever I'm sure you'll find a way to get one."

Betty put her mind to it with such success that inside a quarter of an hour Mrs. Dodd was arranging within a shining white box her work things, scissors and emery and thimble, needle-book and pincushion, threads and silks of various colors, averring with fervor:

"Betty's a good child! This box and the one Miss Timpkins brought me my bunnit in is as

alike as two peas in a pod, and I don't know which to be thankfullest for."

A week had gone by, it was visiting day; and Miss Lydia Barron "from over to Holt," was spending a helpful hour in the southwest front corner room of the Home. She had threaded a couple of dozen needles for Mrs. Dodd, picked up the dropped stitches in Mrs. Wells's knitting, had praised the new bonnet generously, and then asked, "How about your best dress, Aunt Sereny?"

"It's all right far's I know," began Mrs. Dodd, vaguely.

But Mrs. Wells had darted to the closet and was lifting from its hook a gown of old-fashioned square-meshed grenadine, "reg'lar sewing-silk grenadine. Cost four dollars a yard back in '65, war prices them was." She shook out its folds, declaring, "I'll tell you about it, Lyddy. It's a leetle too tight over the chest, the waist-band's a mite snug, and 'twouldn't harm the sleeves any to len'then 'em down as much as half a palm's breadth. I laid awake hours last night mulling over it, and I calc'late the way the style is now that you could squeeze enough out of the skirt to fix it so Sereny wouldn't call the queen her cousin. Ruffles on the sleeves, a girdle belt, and a crosswise strip down the front of the basque, with buttons along the middle."

"That's pretty smart," said Miss Barron. "I'll carry it home now and alter it so that aunty can have it Sunday. But Miss Timpkins keeps

you all pressed up so nice, 'twould be a pity to crumple it. Have you got a box, Aunt Serena?"

"There!" exploded Mrs. Dodd. "You hear that, Samantha Wells?" She rose ponderously.

But Mrs. Wells was already at the hall closet, proclaiming wildly, "O Sereny, 'taint here!"

"But it must be!" insisted Mrs. Dodd. "It must be, I put it there."

"What are you after?" hailed Betty Macdonald, at the end of the corridor.

From the hubbub that followed, she caught the words, "Box! Box! Box!"

"To be sure," she admitted, composedly. "That's where the box was I found for Mrs. Dodd last week."

"You bad, bad, bad, bad, bad child!" wailed Mrs. Dodd.

"But I gave it to you, Mrs. Dodd," protested Betty. "There 'tis this minute," she pointed with indignant finger, "smack on your light-stand."

Mrs. Dodd wrung her hands. "But I didn't know 'twas that one, and I cut it down shallow for my work things, and now my dress won't go into it, and 'twill be all wrinkled, and—"

"Sho, ma'am," soothed Betty, "sho, ma'am! I never sink my foot in any deeper than I can haul it out. I hadn't any more'n give you that box when it flashed into my mind, s'posen some one of the old ladies put it there, and I acted according."

She vanished up the attic stairs, then clattered

down, and soon Mrs. Dodd was embracing with agitated arms another box, another big white shining box!

Ten minutes later, with the grenadine gown carefully packed within the box, "Niece Lyddy from over to Holt," was passing down the graveled path of the Home when Mrs. Dodd rapped sharply on the window pane. "Lyddy! Lyddy!" she shrilled. "Be sure you fetch my bunnitbox back!" Then contentedly settling her plump person in the big Boston "rocker," she said, with unction:

"There ain't no use a-talking, Samanthy Wells! Forethought's the thing! Forethought! Forethought! And though it takes time and stren'th and the will of a Bengal tiger, there ain't nothing like having a box on hand in case!"

CHAPTER VIII

THE FIRE WAGON

APRIL had slipped insensibly into May, not the violet-scented, apple-blossomed, merry, merry month of May, celebrated by the poets, but a very "backward" May, a May, chilly, with no genial warmth; and the dwellers in the big brick building on Quinton hill were still behind closed doors and windows.

Clang! Clang! The notes of a fire-gong smote rhythmically on the air, accompanied by the hoof-beats of galloping horses, the clatter of wagon-wheels, and above all, stentorian cries of "Giddap! giddap!"

Mrs. Dodd, rousing from the cat-nap she had been taking in her big Boston "rocker," muttered, drowsily:

"Seem zif I heerd something!"

"Guess you did," giggled little Mrs. Wells. "There was rumpus enough, I'm sure. 'Twas a fire-wagon out on the avenue. But it's gone now, and you might's well finish out your sail to Noddy's Island."

Mrs. Dodd closed her eyes and Mrs. Wells, resuming her task of setting in order her bureau drawers, mused, "Funny there's any idle hands for Satan to find mischief for, so long's there's

bury drawers above ground to straighten out!"

Presently she cocked her small head on one side and listened intently.

Clang! Clang! Clang! Again sounded the thudding of iron-shod hoofs upon the macadam, the rattling of wagon-wheels, the strident urging forward of the driver.

Mrs. Dodd's black eyes flew wide open. She bent forward and peered out, while little Mrs. Wells, in her haste to reach the window, tipped over the low wooden tabouret upon which she had been sitting, stumbled and was too late to catch even a glimpse of the cause of all the uproar.

"My suzzy me!" groaned Mrs. Dodd. "And I had my reading glasses on, and couldn't make out a thing one-quarter inch beyond my nose!"

Mrs. Wells picked up the tabouret and reseated herself, and her roommate, pushing her spectacles high up on her forehead, grumbled:

"If them fussybudgets of councilmen hadn't voted to stop ringing the bells and have just a still alarm sent in, we'd have known where that fire is, Samanthy Wells!"

"They say 'twas to shut off the little boys," explained Mrs. Wells.

Mrs. Dodd snorted. "Be we little boys? We're the ones it shuts off. We that can't go and don't go, but just hunger and thirst after a leetle information." She went on plaintively, "It used to be awful interesting to count the alarm. Whenever my Boldwood'd hear it, midday

or midnight, no matter where, he'd halt in his tracks and lift his forefinger stern,—if 'twas daylight I'd see him, if 'twas dark, I'd know he was doing it, 'cause why, as old Mr. Henry said, 'I have but one lamp to guide my feet, and that is the lamp of experience,' and Boldwood Dodd, he always done it,—and he'd whisper, 'Hark, Sereny!' and Sereny'd hark. And he'd tick off the bells and haul out the little book the numbers was printed in from his vest pocket, had to get up sometimes to light up to read by, and tell me where 'twas. Then sensing 'twan't anything to us, we didn't own any estates, we'd just settle down like Mr. Abraham Davenport, eating or sleeping or playing backgammon. That was taking solid comfort."

Once more clang! clang! clang! fell upon their ears, and Mrs. Dodd continued excitedly, "Lan-dee, but here's another!"

This time little Mrs. Wells did not stumble as she hurried to her roommate's side.

"Must be a turrible fire somewhere!" averred Mrs. Wells. "S'pose I hunt up Miss Timpkins? She, being matron, ought to—"

"Miss Timpkins ain't to home," interrupted Mrs. Dodd, gloomily. "She was streaking it off down town an hour ago with Nora O'Hara's green plumes a-bobbity-bobbing behind her. And oh, oh, oh! If I ever!" pointing indignantly at a figure flitting through the gate. "Just look at Betty Macdonald a-skipping off

too! But don't you care. There's the college boy that tends the furnace. I'll ask him." She rapped sharply on the window-pane. "Hullo! Hullo you! Where's the fire?"

But the college boy, deaf to the appeal, vaulted over the side fence and disappeared.

"He doesn't hear," lamented Mrs. Wells. The next instant she had darted across the hall, crying, "Sally, Sally Sloane, where's the fire?"

Miss Sloane, lying on her bed, only resting—she never could sleep daytimes, you have her own word for it—responded, dreamily, "What fire?"

Mrs. Wells, scurrying toward the northwest window, answered "The fire! The fire all them fire-teams be going to! Three of 'em's been by the Home already. I don't know what the first two was, for I didn't get to see 'em, only heard 'em, but I calc'late 'twas the steamer and the rope-and-ladder. But the last one was a great big red-painted wagon like the paterole, and chock-a-block full of firemen, some sitting, some standing, some hanging on behind, all whooping like wild Injuns, and the driver with a whip lashing out at them horses, not hitting 'em once, you understand, Sally, but whacking at 'em zif he meant to every minute, and a-scaring them poor beasts nigh unto death! A turrible racket! And you deaf to it!"

Miss Sloane yawned, then rejoined, importantly, "My mind was dealing with other things."

"I was in hopes you'd noticed where they went to," said Mrs. Wells, reproachfully.

"P'raps 'twas the dump," hazarded Miss Sloane.

"The dump's the other way, Sally Sloane! And you know it when you're awake! Where, oh, where is that fire?"

"There's another one coming, Samantha!" called Mrs. Dodd, loudly.

Clang! Clang! Clang! A "great big red-painted wagon" loaded with jostling laughing men swept by, and Miss Sally Sloane regarded them frowningly, commenting:

"Joking and training and carrying on zif they was on their way to a poppy-show! Done just the same when our chicken-coops got on fire, and our big Shanghai crower lost his tail-feathers. They hooted at the poor misfortunate creetur. My, but I was hopping! And I'd 've walked right out and treated 'em to a discourse on manners only for pa; he wouldn't let me out of the house, said fires wa'n't any place for women."

And now along the corridor in her rolling chair trundled old Mrs. Farwell, assisted on the one side by Mrs. Demeter Ford, and on the other by bashful Mrs. Prendergast.

"Where is the fire?" piped Mrs. Farwell, in her thin tremulous tones. "Tell me, tell me!"

"We ain't diskivered yet, ma'am," replied Mrs. Wells, with the respect due from youth to age, while Mrs. Ford, loosing her grip on the chair, stepped forward, proposing:

"Why not go out on the veranda? That would furnish us a grand view."

Mrs. Wells grasped the brass knob of the upper piazza door and tugged and pulled vigorously, but in vain, and she desisted with:

"'Tain't any use! It's locked, and prob'ly Miss Timpkins has hid the key."

For the fifth time the air was shattered by the penetrating clamor of a fire gong, and little Mrs. Wells almost wept.

"Must be a turrible, turrible fire," she wailed. "And me never seeing a real fire in all my life, not even a teenchy bit of a blaze. My Absalom, he'd say, 'When the fire-bells ring, Samanthy, you stay put!' And in them days no man would marry you 'less you promised to obey, and having promised, there wa'n't but one thing to do and I done it. Even the year we was in San Francisco, on board his ship in the harbor, when the fire broke out in the city at eight o'clock in the evening, Absalom said, 'Go to bed, Samanthy!' and sore against the grain, I crawled into my berth—on the Golden Gate side 'twas, too—and he rowed ashore, and come back bright and early next morning to tell me Frisco was in ashes, and me not even getting a blink at it! O me! O my!" She wrung her small hands despairingly.

Old Mrs. Farwell wagged her head sagely.

"That's men!" she affirmed. "Their idees about women is mostly measured out in the same little round pint cup. Now there was my pa,

good a man as ever trod shoeleather, but see what he did. When the British burned Portland, Maine, he and my ma were there on their honeymoon, and what did my pa up and do but hire an old nag and lug ma behind him on it ten miles out into the country, *back* to them flames every rod of the way," impressively, "till he landed her in at Grandpa Dunham's. Then he struck back hotfoot and witnessed the whole performance from eend to eend. Worse and more of it if Grandpa Dunham didn't travel along, too! Both of 'em saying real loving and affectionate that they couldn't enj'y it a mite 'less their wives was safe from danger. Grandma Dunham and my ma they took it pretty hard, and grandma, she was a spirity old body, said their wives didn't want to be safe from danger. What they wanted was to see the goings-on!"

Mrs. Farwell paused and bashful Mrs. Prendergast ventured, timidly:

"Men, they mean well."

"Exactly," conceded Mrs. Ford. "But they're considerable likely to forget that women's human and own just as many eyes and ears as them." She halted as there flashed by a huge red vehicle with its noisy hilarious occupants, and then spoke with decision, "I'm going down to investigate."

"Miss Timpkins won't like it," cautioned Mrs. Wells, but Mrs. Dodd encouraged:

"I glory in your spunk, Demeter Ford! Go right along, only cover your bald spot so if you

do ketch the influenzy, nobody can't twit you of being keerless."

A moment later Mrs. Ford, her apron thrown about her head and clutched vise-like beneath her chin, was marching down the path, and as her companions gazed from above, Mrs. Wells exclaimed:

"Deary, deary me! Betty Macdonald's met her and is bringing her back!"

The little woman, scudding to the top of the stairs, hovered there till she beheld in the lower hall the gleam of Betty's ruddy locks. Then she demanded, eagerly:

"Where's the fire?"

But the maid, unheeding the query, said plaintively as she climbed the stairs, "Can't I just run out to the letter-box 'thout—"

"Don't be cross, Betty!" adjured Mrs. Wells. "All we want is to know where the fire is."

Betty stared. "Fire!" she repeated. "What fire?"

Mrs. Dodd's deep contralto boomed forth from her room: "The fire! The fire all them fire-teams are chasing to! Five—six of 'em kiting along the road zif they was lightning-bugs, and not one of 'em come back yet! And my suzzy me, but here's another! You can see it for yourself if you can't take our word for it, us half a dozen church-members, all in good and reg'lar—"

Clang! Clang! Clang! A fire-wagon sped by, the bay horses dashing recklessly under the threat

of the lash, the driver roaring lustily, and the blue-coats behind him waking the echoes.

"Hear that," triumphed Mrs. Dodd, "and act zif there wa'n't any fire!"

"Well, there ain't any fire!" asserted Betty. "They're just exercising a span of Vermont horses that ain't ever been in a city before. The policeman on our beat told me all about it."

Mrs. Dodd's black eyes snapped. "A new span of horses!" she gibed. "Betty Macdonald, there's been *seven* span raced by already!"

"No, no!" protested Betty. "One span's been round seven times. Now you all settle down and watch out. Like enough, they'll come again."

And they came again, gong clanging, "Clear the track! Clear the track!" wagon-wheels swiftly whirling, horses racing, driver shouting, firemen cheering, and Mrs. Wells sighed, while Mrs. Dodd expressed the general sentiment, "Don't men have the elegantest times?"

CHAPTER IX

THE DAYS FOR OLD GLORY

It was June. At least so it was termed in the almanac, but it was following straitly in the traditions of that preceding month of May which had been, to quote Mrs. Dodd, "as cold as Pharaoh's heart."

Up from King Philip's Bay was whistling a bleak and cutting wind, and little Mrs. Wells, taking her morning "constitutional," shivered and drew more tightly about her shoulders her old-fashioned Paisley shawl. It was later than usual when presently she crossed the end of Harmony Street, and looking a few rods down its length saw the last pupil just entering the primary school. The bell ceased tolling, the clock struck nine, and there was an upward flight of the Stars and Stripes to the top of the flagpole in the school yard, a momentary flutter of the gorgeous bunting at the apex and the unfolding and floating out of the banner upon the brisk breeze.

Mrs. Wells halted and for a few minutes watched entranced, then turned reluctantly homeward, humming:

"Oh, say, can you see by the dawn's early light
What so proudly we hailed at the twilight's last gleam-
ing?"

She unconsciously sang the next words quite aloud,

“Whose broad stripes and bright stars through the
clouds of the fight
O’er the ramparts we watched were so gallantly
streaming!”

And a gardener, clipping the privet hedge before one of Torbolton’s great mansions, lifted his head to peer across the shrubbery and approve:

“Weel sangit, ma’am!”

And Mrs. Wells, pink with confusion, fled precipitately along the avenue to the Home where she was soon announcing to Mrs. Dodd:

“Old Glory’s waving on top of the Harmony Street Primary School flagpole to-day. My, but it’s a splendid sight!”

“It’s always a splendid sight,” agreed Mrs. Dodd, with enthusiasm. “I just love it! But what on airth is it up to-day for? I don’t seem to recollect anything special along this time of year. What day of the month is it, anyhow?”

“The third,” replied Mrs. Wells, promptly.

“Well, what’s June third?” asked Mrs. Dodd. “That will tell the story.”

Mrs. Wells shook her head. “That’s just what I’ve been cudgeling my brains about,” she confessed. “In a general way, I’m first-class on history. Now if this was only April, I wouldn’t hesitate a mite. There’s April twelfth, that’s Sumter, the nineteenth is Lexington and Concord,

the ninth Lee surrendered, and if 'twas May, why May fourth is our own Independence Day and—"

"But 'tain't April or May!" asserted Mrs. Dodd. "It's June!"

"June seventeenth is Bunker Hill Day," pronounced Sally Sloane, waddling in from across the way, where she had been listening interestedly. "But," loftily, "you don't celebrate that in these plantations. That's good old Massachusetts' own particular. My ma was a Massachusetts woman, and I know. Leastwise, 'twas the District of Maine in them days, but it's all the same. Howsomever, Mrs. Wells, in my opinion, it's more'n likely that flag you saw just meant that somebody'd passed away. Wa'n't it hanging halfway down the pole and all kind of droopy?"

"No, 'twa'n't!" retorted Mrs. Wells, with spirit. "'Twas clean up to the tippest top, and blowing out straight's a string!"

"H-m-m-m!" said Miss Sloane, thoughtfully. Then sinking into Mrs. Wells's low wicker sewing chair which creaked protestingly under Miss Sloane's ample avoirdupois, with, "S'pose I might's well be comfortable as long as I stay," she went on, "It must mean something, certain sure. Now, if I only had my calendar the town give me every January when pa was alive and was postmaster, and we lived in our own owned house, and I wa'n't in an institution, I'd find out for you in a jiffy!" She sighed heavily, "Them are the privileges I miss! A new calendar every year, a

leather-covered memorandum book with a pencil tied onto it with a pink ribbon, and if I wanted a postage stamp all I had to do was to drop two cents into the till." She swayed jerkily to and fro, while little Mrs. Wells cast anxious glances at the slender reeds of her chair.

"I've got a calendar, an elegant one my cousin Albertine down in Pictou presented me with Easter," volunteered Betty Macdonald, who had just laid a pile of freshly laundered clothes on the bed. "I'll fetch it to oncet, Mrs. Wells."

There was a rush up the attic stairs, a rush down, and Betty re-entered, proclaiming, "I've got it."

"Thank you, Betty," said Mrs. Wells. "Now your eyes are younger'n mine, just you take a peek inside, and see what happened June the third."

"I can tell you that without peeking," giggled Betty, "but here 'tis, all printed out." She opened the calendar with a flourish. "'Here's to the health of the King! God bless him! George the Fifth, King of Great Britain and Emperor of India, son of Edward the Seventh and Alexandra his queen, born 1865.' Our King's birthday, ladies!" She beamed upon the three women.

Miss Sally Sloane stopped rocking; Mrs. Dodd dropped her knitting; and Mrs. Wells, overcome by a sudden weakness in her knees,—she had seen that flash in Mrs. Dodd's black eyes before,—sat down on the edge of her bed.

"My land!" exclaimed Miss Sloane, with emphasis.

"My landee!" exclaimed Mrs. Dodd, with more emphasis. "I guess you don't know what you're talking about, Betty Macdonald! Our Star-spangled banner up for the King of Great Britain's birthday! Why, we wouldn't done that for Queen Victoria herself, let alone any of her men-folks! That wa'n't what my Great-grandsir Graham fit, bled and died at Bunker Hill for!"

"No, sir-ree! Nor mine at Saratogy!" shrilly declared Miss Sloane. "Nor the other one that went barefoot at Valley Forge! And my pa was out in the coast defense in '12! You just ought to've heerd his tales!"

"I didn't have any one out in '12," interrupted Mrs. Dodd, excitedly. "Good reason why! They all was dead or wa'n't born! But they took their end of the log other times. Uncle Abner stormed the fort at Chapultepec, my husband, Boldwood Dodd, lost a leg in the Wilderness, and I," defiantly, "was a fighting McGay myself before I was married, Betty Macdonald!"

Poor Betty, aghast at the avalanche she had brought down upon herself, stared in bewilderment, and little Mrs. Wells wrung her hands.

"Tut! tut!" A decisive if gentle voice was speaking from the hall. Miss Timpkins had heard the battle raging from afar off, and had now appeared upon the scene. "Betty Macdonald, why aren't you about your work? Ladies, ladies, you

know the rules! You musn't raise your voices!"

"What they raising the flag on the Harmony Street Primary School for, then?" belligerently demanded Mrs. Dodd. "She says—" pointing an accusing finger at Betty, who tearfully protested:

"I didn't! I never!"

"I don't know what they are raising the flag for," returned Miss Timpkins, "but it's easily ascertained. Betty, you go to the telephone, and call up the schoolhouse and find out."

There was an interval of silence in the southwest front corner room while everyone listened to the one-sided telephone conversation. They heard Betty's question, "What's your flag up to-day for?" Then, "Yes, sir. Yes, sir; thank you, sir!"

A second later, Betty's ruddy head bobbed above the balustrade.

"Well?" said Miss Timpkins.

"Yes'm," said Betty, breathlessly, "the janitor, he says it ain't nothing special. Just the law. He raises the flag every day!"

CHAPTER X

THE INVITATION

AND now it was real June; June roses were blooming in the garden of the Home, June sunshine was glinting across the lawn, and into the open windows June breezes were wafting gusts of gay music.

"Now they've struck up 'Ho, lassies and lads, get leave of your dads!'" announced little Mrs. Samantha Wells. "O me! O my!" wistfully, "Wouldn't I admire to be up on them college grounds?"

"Same here!" sighed her roommate. "And," Mrs. Dodd spoke with sudden resentment, "we would be, too, if that college boy that tended our furnace had done his duty by us. 'Member, Samanthu Wells, how I tied up his sore thumb in best Rooshy salve, some I'd had hid away on my closet shelf this seven long years and more? And how you catered to his appetite with one of Peter Rawdon's Sheldon pears last winter, and how Mrs. Prendergast smelled that woodwork a-scorching, and pre-ambled down to that cellar at dark midnight and shut off them drafts and never tattle-taled to nobody? But," stormily, "here we ladies be, not an invite for one of us, only for our matron, who, fur's I can find out, never did one

identical thing for him 'cept pay him his celery every Saturday night!" Her black eyes snapped. "Say what you will, Samanthy Wells, I call it peculiar!"

"It is peculiar," placated Mrs. Wells. "Howsomever, my ma taught me, 'Judge not!' and like enough there's an excellent reason if we only sensed it. F'rinstance, mebbe there ain't room."

"Room!" scoffed Mrs. Dodd. "Room! Why, away back in the middle ages of the last centoory, when there wa'n't any tickets and it was, 'Walk in and welcome,' to the whole of Torbolton, there was room a-plenty; and that was even afore them golfing linkses that stretch away now a quarter mile down to tother road was drained off. Then 'twas Dogwood Swamp, just brimming over with bullfrogs and mud-turkles and skeeters. My suzzy me!" she rubbed her chubby wrists reminiscently. "How them skeeters did enj'y themselves Feet Shampeter nights, when me and Boldwood and the Hitchinses and the Millinses and the Jack Buckinses clim Quinton Hill and meandered about on them three campuses all set round with tall ellums and the walls covered thick with that shiny-leaved thanatopsis. No, no, Samanthy," she wagged her head judicially, "guess you'll have to cunjer up a better 'scuse than that."

But as little Mrs. Wells had apparently no other excuse to offer, Mrs. Dodd went on:

"I've been in to see Miss Timpkins, and she fetched out that invite, and we studied it from all

points of the compass, upside down, back-end-to, ampersand. But when we got through 'twas just the same:

Miss Maria Timpkins,
Corner The Avenue and The Boulevard.

Only that and nothing more. With inside writ' across the admission ticket, 'Compliments of Slater Jones.' That's the boy that tended the furnace, you know. And Miss Timpkins said—I calc'late she wouldn't had it happen for a whole bucketful of Tom Benton's mint drops—p'raps she'd better stay to home, sort of rebuke him by her absence, as it were. But I said, 'For pity's sake, no! We ain't a-cutting off our nose to spite our face.' And we was depending on her to report all the carryings-on. She was 'most ready when I left, had on her sky-blue frock with the lace frills, patent-leather shoes, brandy-spandy new white gloves, and was just going to pin on her hat, that 'Linger-longer-Lucy' one, wreathed around the crown with forget-me-nots." She added as the rustle of stiffly-starched petticoats sounded in the corridor, "Here she comes now."

Ten minutes afterward, Miss Maria Timpkins, having passed beneath the delighted inspection of her little world, was sauntering up the avenue, murmuring:

"It does seem frightfully peacocky of me to parade myself like that before the old ladies, but they like it, and I'm glad to do anything I can to

make up for their disappointment at not going. After all," she smiled good-humoredly, "as the big man said when his little wife beat him with the flyflapper, 'It doesn't hurt me and it amuses her!'"

"Looks fine, don't she?" observed Mrs. Dodd from above. Then, "I tell you what, Samantha Wells, let's us celebrate this festal day, too! Dress up in our best bibs and tuckers." She rose ponderously. "I'll don my black grenadine. You all say it's real becoming, and when I've scraped together a few sou-markees and coaxed my niece Lyddy from over to Holt to apply on a shrimp-pink front, I'll take solid comfort in it myself." As she lifted down the gown from its hook, she ordered, amiably, "You get on your satin-striped nainsook polonay and your steel gray morehair skirt and kite out and roust up the others and tell them, 'Go and do likewise,' and to rig out old Mrs. Farwell in the darned bobbinet fisher mantle she was presented with on her four-score and eleventh birthday. Then we'll all promenade out on the top verandy and watch the folks travel by, and show off our good clothes. We ain't had a chanst to afore in a dog's age! Miss Timpkins, she's so retiring!"

Presently the inmates of the Home, having assembled in the southwest front corner room, Mrs. Wells sallied forth to summon Betty Macdonald to open the upper veranda door. But as she reached the stair-head, there on the floor was a

square white envelope. She picked it up and scurrying back, declared:

"Here's Miss Timpkins's invite! She must have lost it out of her redicule. It's just as you said, Sereny," scanning the address:

Miss Maria Timpkins,
Corner The Avenue and The Boulevard.

"I wonder," pensively, "did she forget her ticket? If she did, they won't 'low her through the gate. Mebbe I'd ought to inquire within." And at Mrs. Dodd's nod of encouragement, the little woman thrust her fingers inside the envelope and wriggled them to and fro. "It ain't here," she remarked. "But—but—" hesitatingly, "I s'pose you seen both envelopes, Sereny?"

"There wa'n't only the one," asserted Mrs. Dodd, but little Mrs. Wells was excitedly separating the edges of two envelopes, and now read from the inner one, "Miss Maria Timpkins *and—and—* Do you hear that, Sereny Dodd? Not Miss Maria Timpkins all by her lonesome, but Miss Maria Timpkins *and—*"

"And what?" demanded Mrs. Dodd.

"And *all—all!*" continued Mrs. Wells in rapturous accents. "*All!* Do you hear that?"

"If 'tain't too much trouble, Samanthy Wells," fumed Mrs. Dodd, "we ladies would like to know all what?"

"It's all of us, Sereny!" exulted Mrs. Wells.

"Miss Maria Timpkins and all the Ladies of the Torbolton Home!"

Mrs. Dodd's jaw dropped. She sat quite speechless, while Mrs. Wells lamented:

"O me! O my! Slater Jones'll feel turrible bad! Just turrible!"

The next instant Mrs. Dodd had rallied, and was affirming, "My Boldwood, he always advised, 'Don't you never cry over spilled milk, Sereny, till you're positive sure 'tis spilled.' And this," sturdily, "ain't. Only the milk can's tipped a mite sidewise and the leastest speck leaked out! 'Tain't seven-thirty yet." She surveyed her companions with satisfaction, and smoothing the silken folds of her gown, rejoiced, "And here be we ladies, with our lamps all trimmed and burning."

It was possibly a half-hour later that Miss Timpkins, pacing sedately along the broad mall that crosses the center campus of the college grounds, was greeted by a stalwart young man, "How do you do, Miss Timpkins? Where are the old ladies? It is so warm and pleasant to-night and the Home is so near that I had hoped—"

As the matron gazed, for a second not recognizing the young fellow in evening clothes as the boy who tended the furnace, the boy in the dingy patched jersey and the funny little cap with the button on top like the grand panjandrum's, he broke off and with an abrupt, "Excuse me!" strode by her.

Turning, Miss Timpkins beheld just outside the Centennial Gates a plump old lady with curly white hair, a plump old lady in black grenadine—to speak plainly, Mrs. Serena Dodd! Behind her, huddled about old Mrs. Farwell who, adorned with the “darned bobbinet fisher mantle,” was sitting very upright in her wheeled chair, were little Mrs. Samantha Wells, Mrs. Demeter Ford, Miss Sally Sloane and bashful Mrs. Prendergast, all with confident eyes fixed upon their leader, as she exhorted the grim policeman and waved a square white envelope before his stern countenance.

“It’s all right, officer!” shouted Slater Jones. “Let ’em in!”

Another moment, and Mrs. Dodd, advancing toward the astonished matron, was proclaiming loudly:

“We diskivered our invite, ma’am! ’Twas on this inside envelope, you’n me never noted. So we’ve stepped right along to the Feet Shampeter. Nora and Betty each had a man-body in the kitchen and they brung Mrs. Farwell clean down to the concrete, and they’re awful accommodating. They’re a-going to visit with Nora and Betty till we get back, and then lug her up again. My suzzy me! But ain’t this gee-lorious! My Boldwood wouldn’t never’ve known it.”

Blissfully she regarded the Chinese lanterns festooned in glowing lines from tree to tree, the platforms built for this day only, decorated with

green boughs and gorgeous bunting, the brilliant banners marking every window, the scintillating electric lights spelling out mystic words above certain doors, and the throngs of pretty maidens and gallant knights.

Then, as if by magic, several young fellows had joined Slater Jones, and Miss Timpkins's wards, each escorted by a cheerful youth,—two pushing old Mrs. Farwell's chair,—were trudging off to the merry strains of "rag-time," while Slater Jones, Mrs. Dodd clinging fast to his arm, was reassuring the matron:

"We'll have 'em back here safe and sound before ten."

The clock in the college belfry was ringing out that hour when a weary but happy little procession was traversing the western slope of Quinton Hill, with Mrs. Dodd chuckling:

"I've had the elegantest time I ever had in all my life! Set right up on one of them piazzys overlooking the front campus afore that 'Hi! Hi! There!' fraternity that Slater Jones belongs to, and et pink strawberry ice-cream and cunning little pink frosted hearts and di'monds his ma sent down all the long road from Possytwixet. 'Tain't no use a-talking, I ain't tasted nothing like 'em since I made 'em myself; Boldwood, he wouldn't never have any but the best. She baked 'em special for us ladies, and," patting the black silk pocket that swung at her side, "I've got one apiece for all of your breakfasts to-morrow, not

to mention a box of them checkerberry wafers to treat Betty and Nora and them men-bodies this very night."

"As for me," avowed Miss Sally Sloane, "I testify there wa'n't no stint to nothing. 'Tennyrate, at the spreads my young man took me into. I sampled," complacently, "chocolate éclairs, angel's food, Oriental kisses, pineapple and orange sherbet, vanilla ice-cream with crushed ros'b'ries poured over it, lemonade and two good cups of hot coffee with oodlins of yellow cream and three lumps of sugar in each. 'Twas lucky for Mrs. Prendergast I met her, for all she was doing was saying, 'No, thank you!' to every mortal thing. But I soon straightened that out, and she finally done most's well's I did. Didn't you, Mrs. Prendergast?"

And as an embarrassed inarticulate response followed from bashful Mrs. Prendergast, Miss Sloane proceeded briskly:

"What'd you have, Mrs. Ford?"

"I couldn't say just what," answered Mrs. Ford, "though 'twas all splendid. You see, my escort set me out a chair by the brass band, and the leader—he blew the organ when I sang down to the old First—recollected me, and hopped down and shook hands, and said he'd play anything I'd choose. That's how we got 'The Gipsy's Warning,' and 'Hark! Hark! the Lark!' and ' 'Tis but a Little Faded Flower,' and somehow," apologetically, "when there's music in the air, I don't seem to

realize what I eat or what I drink or whatsoever I do!"

"My beau," giggled little Mrs. Wells, "piloted me up to the Jimmy Nation place, where they was dancing, floating around zif they was puff-balls on a southerly gale. I never danced none myself, and never got so near folks dancing only oncet afore. That was when Absalom and me went to the Sons of Isaac's picnic, and they'd laid a nice plank floor for them and their ladies to dance on, and I stole up to peek at 'em when Absalom, he ketched me and gripped me by the shoulder and marched me away, gentle, but turrible firm! And I never saw the finish. 'Twas the Court Quadriddle they was dancing to-night. It looked turrible easy,"—she hoppity-skipped joyously,—“and I'm 'most sure I could get the knack in no time!"

"I never danced any, neither," piped up old Mrs. Farwell, who was being trundled comfortably along by Miss Timpkins. "It had kind of gone by in my day, but my ma was a great dancer, went to a frolic oncet when she was sixteen and coming down with the measles! Danced till daylight did appear, and when she got home you couldn't put a pinpoint down on her! And she'd given 'em to thirty-nine people!

"She was so discouraged she never tried it again till after she was married, and then they mixed me up with another baby, and pa and ma never found it out till they reached home, and there was

ten miles to ride back and exchange us! For though 'twas a dretful nice little baby she had," Mrs. Farwell assured her listeners benignantly, "'twa'n't me! But whilst pa and ma was galloping along the lower road, the other couple had started for our house by the upper one, so they missed each other. Then they all put back hot-foot, pa and ma along the upper road this time and tother couple on the lower one, and— Dear, dear, dear!" yawned Mrs. Farwell. "How tired I be!"

"Almost there," cheered Miss Timpkins; and sure enough, there was the Home looming up through the darkness, with Betty and Nora and the two "men-bodies" waiting to assist the wanderers to their rooms; and presently Mrs. Dodd was exclaiming:

"My suzzy me, but this bed doos feel good! And so long's we've been and gone and got back from that Feet Shampeter, Sereny Dodd—though she ain't denying that Miss Timpkins was parlous unnoticing—ain't holding no grudge 'gainst nothing nor nobody!"

CHAPTER XI

THE NIGHT BEFORE THE FOURTH

JUNE had merged into July, and it was the afternoon before the Fourth. The occasional snapping of a torpedo and the sputtering of a firecracker proclaimed that the celebration had begun, and Mrs. Dodd was prophesying, lugubriously:

"No sleep for us this night!"

Little Mrs. Wells nodded rueful acquiescence, while Mrs. John Green, a distant connection of Mrs. Dodd's from "over Ta'nton way" who had driven in for a friendly call, gazed at the two women benignly, and suggested:

"Why not ride back with me and spend the night? We're quiet as kittens out there."

So it was that, several hours later, Mrs. Dodd and Mrs. Wells were installed in the great four-poster within the guest room of the old Green homestead, with their hostess at the door bidding "Good night and pleasant dreams!"

For a few minutes the rule of the Home, "Silence after lights are out," held good. Then:

"Skeeters!" announced Mrs. Dodd.

She slapped her fat arms vehemently, and little Mrs. Wells, also slapping, asserted in plaintive tones:

"So they be! Though truth to tell, I ain't a whit surprised, for Luelly, she owned up they didn't lot much on screens. Liked to give the skeeters their liberty to go out same's they came in!"

"But," protested Mrs. Dodd,—slap! slap!—"they don't go out." Slap! slap! "They stay right here and eat Sereny Dodd up alive!" Slap! slap! slap!

"My, but I'm a silly Billy!" avowed Mrs. Wells, sliding over the edge of the bed. "Clean forgot what I fetched along for fear of your having a ill turn. It's elegant for skeeters."

An instant more, and Mrs. Dodd was rejoicing, "A-h-h-h-h! Camphire," while her roommate, having clambered back into bed, composed herself for slumber.

Presently Mrs. Dodd demanded, querulously, "What's that?"

"What's what?" was the drowsy response.

"That planing-mill out in the pastur."

"Planing-mill!" Mrs. Wells repeated. "That ain't no planing-mill, Sereny. Them's crickets chirping!"

"Huh!" scoffed Mrs. Dodd. "Next thing you'll be saying that bellerling out yonder is grasshoppers!"

"I shan't either!" said Mrs. Wells. "'Cause why? 'Tain't! Nor bumble-bees nor chipmunks nor 'Go to the ant, thou sluggards!' For pity's

sake, Sereny, ain't you ever been in the country before?"

"Not overnight," confessed Mrs. Dodd. "Leastwise not since they moved me an infant babe from Chepiwanoxet. But you needn't get into such a pucker all at once. What are them roarers, anyhow?"

"Frogs," answered Mrs. Wells, wearily. "Just bull frogs croaking."

"Well, bullfrogs or bulls of Bashan, whichever they be, they ain't," with emphasis, "had one speck of bringing up!" pronounced Mrs. Dodd. "Hark to 'em, a-mocking at me." She intoned in her deep contralto, "Sereny Dodd! Dodd! Dodd! 'Odd! 'Odd! 'Odd! 'Dd! 'Dd! 'Dd!" adding pettishly, "I s'pose that's a rosebug blethering under the window?"

"Sho!" deprecated Mrs. Wells. "How you talk, Sereny! That's a Katy-did, Katy-didn't. But what the poor dumb animal is hollering about is one of the Mister Rees! Howsomever, they be powerful argyers, have it back and to, hours on eend. But," cheerily, "they don't bother me any. It's them whippoorwills mourning from the woods beyond that tug at my heart-strings. Listen, now. Whi-ip po-o-or wi-ill, whi-ip po-o-or wi-ill!" she chanted. "Whi-ip po-o-or wi-ill!"

"Ur-r-r-r-r!" shuddered Mrs. Dodd. "You make me go all creepy-crawly, Samanthy Wells! 'Sides, there's a billion and 'leven skeeters feast-

ing on me this very second! Gimme the camphire."

"Here 'tis," said Mrs. Wells, "and afore you drop off, mebbe I'd ought to 'splain to you what some of them noises be you ain't sensed yet. That rasping zif someone was filing tenpenny nails is the locusses. Sign 'twill be turrible hot to-morrow."

"They ought to be ashamed of theirselves!" fumed Mrs. Dodd. "Hot enough now 'thout no one making it any hotter! Whew!" She fanned herself with the sheet, while Mrs. Wells continued placidly:

"That wish-whacking against the house is cause the wind's riz a mite and's banging them branches about. I noted them when we first arriv, for thinks I, how turrible handy for a robber to shin up that elm tree—"

"Robber!" gasped Mrs. Dodd. "Robber!"

"We're perfectly safe," soothed little Mrs. Wells. "It's been a comfort to me all my life and I'd as lieves as not pass it along to you—robbers don't never go where there's naught. My nephew, Peter Rawdon, he says, 'Paste that in your bunnit, Aunt Samanthy.'"

"But tramps do," quavered Mrs. Dodd, "and bears and wolves and—"

"They can't!" Mrs. Wells spoke with authority. "The town's started a woodyard to skeer off the tramps. Luelly told me so. There ain't been even a Teddy bear here since the new President was nominated, and as for wolves, the one good thing about them is they can't climb trees. Now,"

coaxingly, "just you settle down and catch your forty winks."

"Provided," groaned Mrs. Dodd, "these skeeters leave me anything to catch 'em with! Gimme the camphire."

"Hadn't you better keep it, Sereny?" gently asked Mrs. Wells, and her roommate conceded:

"P'r'aps. Then I'll know where 'tis."

The night wore on. Clutching the camphor bottle to her breast, Mrs. Dodd dozed fitfully. She heard the monotonous whir, whir, of the wind-mill, the stamping of the iron-shod hoofs of the horses in the stable and always the vicious keening of the mosquitoes.

Again she was wide awake, questioning, "What's that?" The gray light of the morning was stealing into the room; in the east was the rosy promise of the dawn. "Cock-a-doodle-doo!" was filling the air.

Mrs. Wells sat up in bed. "You poor thing!" she laughed. "That's a rooster, the big head one of all. I calc'late he's on the fence, kind of teaching the little ones. I guess most of the spring chickens this year was crows. Listen to 'em mimicking! Ain't they cute? And that quack-ing is the duck trailing down to the pond, and that outrageous squawking is guinea-hens. There's cows out there crowding up to the bars, mooing to be milked. That 'Baa, baa, black sheep' is the dear little lambkins bleating for their mas. The pigs is squealing for their breakfast,

and that 'Hark from the tombs a doleful sound,' is the pigeons cooing."

"That all?" inquired Mrs. Dodd, grimly.

"All I locate now," was the amiable rejoinder. "But if you hear 'Gobble! Gobble! Gobble!' that's turkeys. Geese, they hiss-s, so! Can't you get another nap, Sereny?" she went on, solicitously. "It's too light for skeeters now."

"But just light enough for flies," grumbled Mrs. Dodd. "And they have their liberty in and out, too! O me! O my!" Then, "What's that?"

"That" was the distant rumbling of heavy wheels, which grew louder as they approached the house. There was the babel of many voices, the measured tread of many feet, and a fife and drum corps piped up merrily:

"If you get there before I do
Just tell 'em I'm a-coming, too!"

Little Mrs. Wells slipped from the bed, and pattering to the window, peered out. "It's soldiers, Sereny!" she reported, gleefully. "Soldiers, with blue jackets and yellow belts and red pants! And they're carrying the Star-Spangled Banner!"

Mrs. Dodd craned her neck. "I see it, too!" she exulted. "The gold ball on the tippest point of the pole and three bright stars and the upper broad stripe! Oh, ain't it bee-yutiful?"

"Nothing like it!" vaunted little Mrs. Wells, while Mrs. Dodd resumed happily:

"And now I can see it all! The whole on it!

They're rising the hill! They've stopped, and now they're marching into the field."

"There go John and the hired man and the dog chasing after!" cried Mrs. Wells. "Oh, don't I wisht I was dressed! I'd chase too!"

Boom! The window-sash rattled, the house shook.

"What's that? What's that?" implored Mrs. Dodd, frantically.

Boom! The door was pushed open. Mrs. Green beamed at them from the threshold. "Dear me!" she exclaimed. "Did it wake you?" Boom! "That's too bad!" Boom! "It's the 'Up Guards and at 'em!' from Ta'nton. Every year they haul the old cannon we had for the coast defense in 1812 to the top of our hill and welcome in Independence Day." Boom! "You won't mind it after your good night's rest, though." Boom! "They only salute twenty-four times." Boom! Boom! She was gone.

Boom! Boom! Bo-o-om-m-m! Half a dozen window panes fell tinkling to the floor, the house reeled on its foundations, the hills reverberated to the thunder of the explosion.

"My soul be on thy guard!" moaned Mrs. Dodd.

From the road came a stentorian shout, "'Tain't nothing! There ain't no one hurt. A spark flew into the powder barrel and blew it up skyhigh. But don't you care. Sim and me is going over to the armory to get some

more to finish up with. We'll be back soon!"

Mrs. Dodd thrust a pair of plump feet over the side of the bed, and Mrs. Wells, pale and trembling, was assisting her in the perilous descent from the four-poster.

"I shan't wait for 'em!" declared Mrs. Dodd, sinking into the huge Martha Washington chair. "Samanthy Wells, where's my stockings?"

"But you can't go!" remonstrated Mrs. Green, as the two women appeared before her. "John and Sim have taken both horses——"

"If there ain't any 'commodation for us to ride," broke in Mrs. Dodd, stonily, "we'll walk! And when I can't walk any further, I'll go on my bended knees!"

Distressed and disturbed, Mrs. Green followed her guests down the path to the gate. Then a look of relief overspread her face as she espied, clattering along the highway, a belated milk-wagon. It was but a moment's work to hail the driver and state the case, and soon Mrs. Dodd was ensconced beside him with little Mrs. Wells perched on a hassock at her feet, both waving a gay good-by, and calling back, "Remember our love to John!"

The bells of Torbolton had just rung eleven o'clock. Every one from the vicinity of the Home for Indigent Females had gone down-town to view the military parade, and a Sabbath day calm reigned. Mrs. Dodd, her curly white head reposing on the back of the big Boston "rocker,"

was slumbering peacefully, while little Mrs. Wells, sitting in her small sewing-chair, was meditating.

Suddenly the little woman giggled.

Mrs. Dodd's black eyes popped open. "What's that?" she queried.

"It's me!" said Mrs. Wells, giggling again. "I've been cudgeling my brains about what your cousin Luelly could have meant by 'quiet as kittens.' For Luelly's honest as the sunshine, and wouldn't tell a wrong story for a mint of money, and I calc'late I've tracked it out at last. Recolleck the po'try in the Fifth Reader 'bout the cats, Sereny?"

Mrs. Dodd stared. "Cats! What cats?"

"The cats Luelly must have meant," said little Mrs. Wells, smiling. "Kilkenny cats! Kilkenny kittens! See, Sereny?"

CHAPTER XII

THE FOUR O'CLOCK BAKE

THE star of Sirius was in the ascendant, in other words dog-days had come, but on this particular afternoon in late July the fog that had hung in the air throughout the morning had cleared away, and now from a blue and perfect sky the sun shone forth, sending arrows of light through the mist-wet foliage of the great elms that guarded the Home and flashing into a myriad rainbows the spray of the tiny fountain that played merrily on the green lawn beneath.

"Hi! Hi! Hi, there!"

That was Betty Macdonald, a white cap on her ruddy locks, and snowy apron tied neatly about her trim waist, dashing down the wide graveled path and frantically waving a freckled hand toward the approaching electric car.

Behind her trailed Mrs. Demeter Ford, bashful Mrs. Prendergast, little Mrs. Wells and Miss Sally Sloane, while in the rear hovered Miss Maria Timpkins, shoing forward the company as one might shoo a flock of hens, and murmuring, agitatedly:

"We'll lose that car, sure's fate! I know we shall!" Then she exhorted, shrilly, "Call again, Betty. Call louder!" And thus adjured, Betty uttered another ear-splitting shriek:

"Hi! Hi! Hi-i-i-i!"

"Take your time! Take your time, ladies!" shouted the conductor from the platform.

"What's the place and who are they?" queried a tall young man on the back seat.

"It's our Old Ladies' Home and they're the old ladies," was the reply, and as the motorman twisted the brake, the conductor sprang off and greeted them:

"Howdy-do! Howdy-do, ladies! Upsy daisy, grandma!" With one effort of his stalwart arms he lifted little Mrs. Wells bodily to the running-board, in a trice had bundled the other women into the car, and climbing back and ringing the bell, remarked, genially:

"A splendid lot of old ladies in that Home and I know every one of them by name and fame. There's been the top of the town among them before now, and don't you forget it! But," breaking off, "I wonder where Mrs. Dodd is."

He stepped along to the matron's side, demanding, "Where's Mrs. Dodd? Don't like to see her left out!"

"Oh, she wasn't left out," responded Miss Timpkins. "She just wouldn't come!" And being engrossed in the distribution of nickels for her charges that each might enjoy the pleasure of paying her own fare, she said no more until after the conductor had returned from his round. Then she went on:

"These new electrics are so much higher than

the old horse-cars that she lames her knees frightfully every time she rides on them. Didn't get down to her meals for three days after her last trip! And when I invited her this noon—we're all going down to Ageram Point to the four o'clock bake—she said no, that she knew when she was licked! And she'd stay home and keep house with old Mrs. Farwell.

"But," opening her capacious holdall and displaying a shining tin can, "we're doing our best for her. I'm taking this to bring some chowder in, and Mrs. Wells has brown paper and string in her pockets for clam cakes. Mrs. Dodd loves clam cakes!"

The conductor shook his head. "Good far's it goes," he admitted. "But I expect that the old lady would like a whole clam dinner and all the fixin's."

He made his way back to the platform, and glaring at a pair of prancing bays and a glittering victoria just passing, grumbled, "Pesky shame! Folks exercising fat lazy horses before empty carriages, and nice old ladies sitting at home just pining to get somewhere!"

"What's the matter?" asked the tall young man with interest.

"They're going to Ageram Point to the four o'clock bake," answered the conductor, "but Mrs. Dodd wouldn't come, and I tell you I miss her! Miss Timpkins thinks she knows why Mrs. Dodd wouldn't come, but I *know* I know! You see the

old lady's pretty sizable, and last time she rode with me I had a tough time getting her aboard. But I did it, and she was all comfortably settled when a crittur settin' right where you're settin' now winked and grinned at me and said, 'Say, I don't have to go to no circus to see a baby elephant!' I knew Mrs. Dodd heard him for she colored up red's a beet, and I snapped him up, 'Naw! And I don't have to go to no circus to see a jackass!' Mrs. Dodd was mighty grateful, and squeezed my hand good when I got her out. Hurt feelings is a sight harder to bear than hurt knees," then with a softening of his tone, he added, "I like old ladies. My grandma brought me up."

"So did mine!" averred the young man. "Well," rising to his feet, "here's where I leave you."

Half an hour later, Mrs. Serena Dodd, rocking to and fro beside the window in her room, was startled by the appearance of Betty Macdonald at her door, announcing:

"A visitor for you, ma'am."

Mrs. Dodd dropped the fan that she had been resignedly plying. "A visitor!" she exclaimed. "A visitor! Why, 'tain't visiting day!"

"Sure not!" agreed Betty, with amiability. "That's what I told him. But he—"

"A him! A he!" repeated Mrs. Dodd.

"Yes, ma'am!" said Betty. "A him! A he! With gray eyes and a clean shaven chin with a dimple in it. A lovely young fellow! And when I told him 'twa'n't visiting day, said he, 'I can't

help that. I'm from out of town and must see Mrs. Dodd.' "

"Well," said Mrs. Dodd, glancing at the mirror, "it's lucky I dressed up in my black grenadine even if I did stay to home. But my breast-pin's on crooked. You straighten it before you let him up."

Meanwhile Miss Timpkins and her little band had sailed happily down the bay, landed at Age-ram Point, and were trudging up the wharf to where rosy rotund Colonel Pepperlee, the proprietor of the point, was roaring:

"Right this way! Right this way! Best bake on the bay! Only fifty cents a plate, I say!"

He halted in his "patter" as the group of women paused before him, and muttered, "Four old ladies in bunnits and a middling young one in hat and feathers. Now then, Pepperlee, tact, tact!"

He smiled ingratiatingly, his white teeth gleaming, and swept off his low-crowned slouch hat in a profound bow to the matron,

"Is this Miss Timpkins and her ladies from Torbolton?"

"Why ye-es," hesitated Miss Timpkins, "but—"

The colonel broke in hurriedly.

"Pleased to meet you, ma'am," he said. "Your bake won't be ready for quite a spell yet, and my advice is for you all to go right over to the piazza and sit tight and take it easy. Don't worry about nothing. I'll keep my eye on you and let

you know when the dinner's served. No, no," as Miss Timpkins produced her purse, "we'll arrange that later."

And with another bow, he restored his hat to his head and resumed his rhythmic harangue.

"My, but ain't he curchus!" gurgled little Mrs. Wells, trotting beside the matron toward the spot indicated by Colonel Pepperlee.

"He's courteous enough," assented Miss Timpkins, warily, "but how on earth did he know us?"

Miss Sally Sloane bridled. "Well, now, we ain't quite so no-account as all that!" she commented. "There's more know us than we know," complacently. "We're public characters, Miss Timpkins!" And pluming themselves on this solution of the riddle, the company waited patiently during the next three-quarters of an hour.

At last there was wafted to their nostrils the mingled aroma of steaming rockweed and clams, and Mrs. Wells sniffed exultantly.

"The bake's open!" she piped. "I smell it! Ain't it *dee-licious*?"

With one accord the women started for the big dining-hall with its long bare trestle-boards flanked on both sides by rows of round unpainted wooden stools, but they were intercepted by Colonel Pepperlee, more smiling, more "curchus" than ever.

"Not there! Not there! This way, if you please!" And the women, bewildered but docile

to the voice of man, followed the colonel through an adjacent door.

They were in a private dining-room. Before them was a table spread with a table-cloth, a linen table-cloth, as was later established by Miss Sally Sloane's rubbing a fold of the material betwixt thumb and forefinger. With napkins! Real napkins, not squares of pink, green and yellow tissuepaper as in the public hall, scalloped along the edges, it is true, but nevertheless, only tissue paper. Real chairs, too! chairs with cane seats and good high backs, in one of which Miss Sally promptly deposited her plump person, breathing gratefully:

"Praise be! I'd rather have half a dinner with a whole back than a whole dinner with none!"

But the others held aloof, little Mrs. Wells, clutching at the matron's arm and warning her excitedly, "This ain't any fifty cent dinner, Miss Timpkins. It's a seventy-fiver! My nephew Peter Rawdon—" and Miss Timpkins spoke hastily:

"It must be a mistake, sir! I can't pay—"

"You don't pay a penny," reassured the colonel. "Not a penny! It's a treat."

Miss Timpkins gasped, Mrs. Wells gasped, they all gasped.

But Mrs. Wells was the first to recover speech, and exclaimed, "A treat! A treat! Do you hear, ladies? Colonel Pepperlee's treating us!"

and beaming joyously upon the colonel, she bobbed a courtesy.

"Thank you, Colonel! Thank you kindly!" she declared.

"Not at all! Not at all!" said Colonel Pepperlee, his rosy face paling in consternation. "'Twa'n't me. 'Twas an order from the city. A telephone order."

A chug and a whir outside interrupted the colonel; he almost ran to the door. There was an anxious question, a satisfactory reply, and the next instant he ushered in a tall young man, a young man with pleasant gray eyes and a clean shaven dimpled chin, escorting an old lady in a black grenadine gown, a black chip bonnet trimmed with pink rosebuds, and a lace veil swinging over one shoulder, a ponderous old lady with curly white hair and sparkling black eyes and a countenance aglow with happiness and heat.

"Why-ee! It's Sereny!" cried Mrs. Wells. "Sereny Dodd, how come you here?"

"In an automobile!" affirmed Mrs. Dodd, rapturously. "In an automobile! A lovely little low one! I slid into it slick's a whistle! 'Twas him," nodding toward her companion, "brought me. We flew like old Nick was chasing us, and I wa'n't scared a mite."

She surveyed the table joyously. "My suzzy me! Ain't it elegant? Cowcubers and cracked ice, Bermudy onions and celery, plum brown bread and white biscuit! Ah-h-h-h!" Mrs. Dodd would

have smacked her lips had it been *quite* ladylike.

"And it's all my party! He said so. Set you down, ladies, and make yourselves to home," hospitably. "Leastwise," with a glance at Miss Sally Sloane, "those of you as ain't done it already! Samanthy Wells, you quickstep it over here. Miss Timpkins, you look out for Mrs. Prendergast. She's so bashful she won't get a mouthful 'less you tend to her. Now, now, now!" severely, perceiving that the matron was about to speak. "This ain't any time for probing into things. I want my clam dinner! Old Mrs. Farwell's all right," reassuringly, "sleeping like a dormouse, and Betty and Nora is going to set with her, one or the other, every minute till we all get back."

Then the waiters swarmed in, and it was hot clams here and hot clams there and more hot clams. There was a clatter of dishes and hubbub of tongues, and presently Mrs. Dodd's astonished accents soared high above the din, as she gazed amazed and dismayed at the young man beside her:

"You poor lamb! Where were you raised? Massy sakes! You don't eat clams with a fork! Just you watch me. You open the shell, so. You pull out the clam, so. You dip it into melted butter, so. And you bite it off, so. Now you try."

And beneath the sympathetic contemplation of six pairs of eyes, her pupil endeavored to show that he had acquired the art.

There were chowder and lobsters and clam frit-

ters and broiled blue-fish and fried tautog, green corn, watermelon, Indian pudding and whipped cream, pineapple sherbet and little frosted cakes.

"To think, oh, to think," sighed Miss Sally Sloane, "of having money enough to pay for a feast like this!"

She carefully polished her sherbet saucer with a scrap of one of the little frosted cakes of which she had eaten a greater number than she would have wished to have counted. Then peering over her glasses at the long expanse of table, she whispered to Mrs. Demeter Ford a triumphant, "We've et every speck of the sherbet, but," disappointedly, "there's a round dozen of them darling cakes left yet!"

Mrs. Dodd, too, had been eying the table. "Samanthy Wells!" she cried. "Your ma and mine taught us always to remember the absent. Where's that brown paper and string you were so brash about?"

The boom of the sunset gun floated over the water. Chairs scraped back and all trooped out to the veranda to find beside the little runabout that had whisked Mrs. Dodd and the unknown down from the city, Colonel Pepperlee's own two-seated car and the colonel himself to drive it. Yes, indeed! It was a snug fit, but would not you be willing to be packed in like a sardine if you had never had an automobile ride in your life before and never expected to again?

The horns tooted gloriously, the cars sped

along the boulevard, dived through the east entrance to the park, whirled about the lakes, and popping out of the west entrance, raced down the avenue, and crossing the lower bridge puffed up Quinton Hill to where Betty Macdonald was waiting at the gate. As the maid put up her hand to assist Mrs. Dodd to alight, the old lady thrust into it a brown paper parcel tied about with hempen string and bulging richly with a round dozen of frosted cakes. "For old Mrs. Farwell and you and Nora!" chuckled Mrs. Dodd.

A moment later she was toiling up the path upon Betty's supporting arm, while Miss Timpkins, balancing herself, one foot on sea and one on land, that is to say, one foot on the motor car step and the other on the concrete, and staring after the other car that had just disappeared about the corner, ejaculated, in dismay:

"Why, he's gone! Mrs. Dodd, Mrs. Dodd, who is he?"

But panting Mrs. Dodd had no breath with which to answer, and it was not until seated in her rocking chair, her bonnet and veil off, a hassock beneath her feet, and a glass of good cold water disposed of, that she rejoined, composedly:

"Don't know. Never asked him."

"Don't know! You never asked him!" The matron stood aghast. "You went without even knowing his name!"

"Yes, I did!" retorted Mrs. Dodd. "He came here and said he'd seen you on the trolley and had

come to take me to the bake. That was recommend enough for me, and I went. O me! O my!" ecstatically, "didn't we have a bee-yutiful time? He was a turrible nice young fellow, but I couldn't tell you who he was any more'n the man in the moon."

CHAPTER XIII

THE MAPLE SUGAR CAKES

It was the middle of August, and Mrs. Dodd was affirming, lugubriously, "Most three weeks since anything's happened in this Home. What with all the board out of town and my niece Lyddy from over to Holt and your nephew Peter Rawdon, likewise, I don't 'spect there's any chance of it neither." She groaned aloud.

A moment later there rattled up the avenue a red delivery wagon; it halted before the Home, the driver raced up the steps, the bell rang imperatively, and little Mrs. Wells, peeping from the window, announced, "Great Northern 'Spress, Sereny!"

Some one was mounting the stairs. "Mebbe, oh, mebbe—" whispered Mrs. Wells. And almost immediately, Betty Macdonald was standing at the threshold, proclaiming:

"A package for you, Mrs. Dodd, from Miss Lydia Barron, Hillcrest, New Hampshire—"

"That's where my niece Lyddy from over to Holt's visiting," exclaimed Mrs. Dodd.

"And one for you, Mrs. Wells, from Mr. Peter Rawdon, Mountain View, Vermont."

"My nephew Peter likes Vermont best," chirped Mrs. Wells, proudly.

Betty lingered. "Want me to undo 'em?" she volunteered.

"No, thank you, Betty," chorused the two women with dignity, but an instant after the withdrawal of the maid, scissors were produced, there was swift cutting of cords, unwrapping of paper and lifting of box-covers, followed by rapturous "Ohs!" and "Ahs!"

"If there's one thing more'n another topside this green airth that I dote on," exclaimed Mrs. Dodd, "it's six cunning little heart-shaped cakes of maple sugar like these, with butternut meats strewed thick through 'em!"

And little Mrs. Wells echoed, happily:

"Me, too, Sereny! Only my six are round, with scalloped aidges and the butternut meats is sticking out all over like porkypine quills!" She pinched off a scallop, and popping it into her mouth, murmured ecstatically, "M-m-m! M-m-m! M-m-m!" and again "M-m-m!"

And Mrs. Dodd, across the lightstand, pinched off the point from one of the heart-shaped cakes, popped it into her mouth, and in her turn, murmured:

"M-m-m! M-m-m! M-m-m!" and again, "M-m-m!"

Joyously and in unison the two women munched, until at last Mrs. Dodd, surveying the remainder of the cakes, made a bold proposition. "Samanthy," said she, "s'pose you and me hide the rest of 'em! Tuck 'em away somewhere out of sight,

and eat 'em ourselves when we get good and ready."

Little Mrs. Wells stared, her eyes grew rounder and bigger and bluer, her cheeks flushed. "Why-ee, Sereny!" she protested. "Don't that sound turrible—turrible—" she paused, confused, "so to sa-ay—"

"Piggy?" supplemented Mrs. Dodd, unabashed. "Yes, piggy! Well, let's be piggy for oncet in our lives and enj'y the experience."

But her roommate, unconvinced, objected. "No, no, Sereny! That won't ever do!" Then her face brightened, her tone changed, she laughed aloud. "P'raps you're right, Sereny!" She opened the upper drawer of her bureau. "I can stow mine in here, and you can poke yours underneath the lightstand! 'Twill be easy for you to get at!" She was about to seat herself, when Mrs. Dodd remarked:

"So long's you're up, I wonder if you'd mind going downstairs and hinting to Betty Macdonald that it wouldn't be no harm if next week she didn't iron my capstrings quite as crooked as a ram's horns?"

"Not a mite," responded Mrs. Wells, amiably, "and whilst I'm down, I'll run out and get a breath of fresh air."

"So do!" urged Mrs. Dodd. "And take your time." She lunged forward in the big Boston "rocker," gaining her feet with the sudden impetus. "I'll visit a spell with old Mrs. Farwell."

She ambled from the room and presently Mrs. Wells, too, was gone.

It was the next morning, breakfast was over, and Mrs. Dodd, comfortably ensconced in her chair beside the window, was placidly contemplating the little woman opposite. "Time for another maple-sugar cake, ain't it, Samantha?" she asked.

"Yes, indeedy!" replied Mrs. Wells. "But 'tain't worth while hauling out both boxes, Sereny. Besides I've got my mouth all made up for one of them dear little cunning hearts of yours!"

"Same here!" chuckled Mrs. Dodd, "only I'm honing for one of them rounds with scalloped aidges. You get 'em right out."

Mrs. Wells rose reluctantly, moved slowly to the bureau, drew out the upper drawer, peered within, fumbled vaguely about, then turned and gazed mournfully at her companion.

Mrs. Dodd's benignant expression faded into one of anxiety. "What—"

"I s'pose," interrupted Mrs. Wells, desperately, "I s'pose I might as well own up first as last! I ain't got one speck of maple sugar to my name! Not a crumb! Neither scallops nor middles! Not anything!"

"None left!" cried Mrs. Dodd, astounded. "None left, Samantha!"

"'Tain't any use a-carrying on!" avowed Mrs. Wells, very pale, but very determined. "I gave 'em away! That's what!"

"But you said—"

"You said," corrected Mrs. Wells, "s'pose we hid 'em and et 'em ourselves when we got good and ready! And it was a fine scheme for them as could, but I couldn't. Massy sakes, I don't believe it was one-half hour by the clock before I'd begun distributing. First off I salved over your message to Betty Macdonald by presenting her with one of the rounds. She hadn't seen any since she came out from Pictou last spring."

Mrs. Dodd grasped her pudgy left thumb with her pudgy left hand. "One!" she said, resignedly.

"And Nora O'Hara was watching just as interested. Poor girl, she hadn't even ever heard of such a thing! They don't grow neither maple sugar nor butternuts in Roscommon."

"Two is Nora." Mrs. Dodd laid a sturdy forefinger beside her thumb.

"And when I clipped it out into the yard after that breath of fresh air I mentioned to you," continued Mrs. Wells, "I met Sandy McAllister mowing the grass, and he touched his cap so respectful and said, 'How do, Mrs. Wells? How's Mrs. Dodd to-day?' " She paused a moment and added dreamily, "Did you ever mark, Sereny, how we set store by folks who don't ever forget our names? And so—"

Mrs. Dodd nodded. "Thimble finger, three," she stated.

"And as I traveled down toward the gate, if there scooting along the avenue, wa'n't the electric car with the one I call my conductor on it, he

that whisks me aboard zif I was a bag of live geese feathers, and I hailed him to oncet. He jumped off, and said I, 'Love maple sugar?' and said he, 'Yes, ma'am!' and said I, 'Here's some!' and a tickleder man you never see. His teeth was in it before he'd pulled the car bell, and he and the motorman—I sent him my last cake—waved all the way down the hill till I was all a-trimble, I was that fearful they'd skip the track."

"Ring finger, four; little finger, five," counted Mrs. Dodd. Her hands dropped limply into her lap, while Mrs. Wells, sinking into her low wicker chair, went on:

"'Course I wouldn't been quite so free passing 'em out if I hadn't known you had plenty and to spare. You see just how 'twas. I depended on you, Sereny."

Mrs. Dodd fixed aggrieved black eyes upon the little woman. "Then, Samanthy Wells," she spoke with decision, "all I've got to say is that you've depended on a broken reed! And I s'pose I might's well own up first 's last. I ain't got a cake of maple sugar left to my name! Not a single identical one. Not ary crumb. I gave *mine* away. I couldn't help it. You ain't the only crittur with that kind of a natur'. Why, I'm pretty positive that 'twa'n't a half of half an hour before Sereny Dodd had begun distributing. Though to be up and down honest," she confessed, candidly, "'twa'n't my intention to do as I did. Leastwise not so slambang quick. But the

tongue, Samanthy," she wagged her head dolefully, "the tongue! Fact is, I bragged. I bragged to old Mrs. Farwell what splendid maple sugar they manufactured up in the Granite State, and she answered right up in her soft way that Maine maple sugar was better, Maine butternut meats was better, and Maine's motto was 'I lead.' She was sot as sot about it. And I stiv-ered straight back and got the maple sugar cakes to prove it wa'n't so."

"Did you prove it?" asked Mrs. Wells, eagerly.

"No, I didn't! She et a cake, and she smacked her lips, and said right over again, gentle's a turtle-dove, Maine maple sugar was better, Maine butternuts meats was better, and State o' Maine was still a-leading. And you can't argy only just so much with a lady ninety-two last birthday. And square in the midst of it, in marched Sally Sloane, and naterally I gave her a cake. And after her Mrs. Ford, and I gave her another. They relished 'em something amazing. And by that time I'd sort of got my hand in, and I hunted up Mrs. Prendergast. She's so bashful she couldn't seem to sense first off that the maple sugar heart was for her, but soon's she did, she was perfect joy. Why, when she was a little tot in pantalets and low-necked, short-sleeved frocks her pa had a maple sugar orchard, and outside her chamber window where she could pick and eat any hour of the day or night, climb out on 'em too, if she took the notion, was much as a dozen

great hahnsome butternut trees. Then I scud, and there out in the gallery was Miss Timpkins, Miss Maria Timpkins, the matron of this Home, Samantha! She that's been a mother, a more'n mother to us ladies!"

"O me! O my!" lamented little Mrs. Wells. "What did you do?"

"Do! Do! Why, I gave her a maple sugar cake! That's what I done! Punted up to her like I was a drum-major, and presented her with the very last one of them cunning little maple sugar hearts strewed thick all through with butternut meats zif I'd meant to from the beginning, and had four thousand more behind 'em. Yes, sir-ree, bob!"

She beamed at little Mrs. Wells, who sighed blissfully. "Well, that's all right. My, I wouldn't had Miss Timpkins slighted for—" she glanced through the window toward the river bank—"for Roger Williams's Rock with Roger himself sculpted out on it, picket fence and all thrown in!" She extracted from the upper bureau drawer the box that had held the maple sugar rounds with scalloped edges and declared, "Empty as a last year's bird's nest!" And Mrs. Dodd, producing from beneath the lightstand a similar box, amended:

"Empty as two last year's bird's nests, Samantha! Howsomever," cheerily, "we've had lots of fun out of 'em."

"And now," proceeded Mrs. Wells, "we must

mind our manners. Last night Nora O'Hara exchanged that two-cent postage stamp I've been cherishing for time of need for two one-centers at the 'pothecary's, and I'll donate you one. And Betty fetched me two picture postal cards that come with the last baking powder tins, 'Pancake Island Viewed from the Railroad Bridge,' and 'The Dumplings at High Tide.' Take your ch'ice, Sereny." She placed the cards before her roommate and directed, "You write, 'Thank you, ma'am,' and I'll write, 'Thank you, sir,' and we'll both write, 'They tasted *dee-licious!*' "

CHAPTER XIV

MRS. DODD'S TEN-CENT PIECE

"SEVENS! That's miles too big!" averred Mrs. Dodd, as she eyed disconsolately the pair of Congress gaiters that lay in her lap. "Six and a half is my size."

"If you'd only try them on!" urged Miss Timpkins, but Mrs. Dodd shook her head.

"'Tain't no manner of use," she stated, firmly.

The matron looked around helplessly. "I don't see how I can do one thing to-day." Her eyes fell on little Mrs. Wells and a new idea presented itself. "I wonder," she addressed the little woman, "if you wouldn't like to ride downtown with Betty on the car—it's her afternoon out—and exchange the shoes at the Hub store. Betty'd go in with you and I'd arrange the rest by telephone. You could come home alone?" tentatively. And Mrs. Wells almost danced for joy as she agreed:

"Yes, indeedy, ma'am!"

And thus it was on this pleasant day in early September that Mrs. Wells, with the number six and a half Congress gaiters under her arm, was pacing homeward along Abbey Street, the main thoroughfare of the town, communing with herself:

"That last ten-cent piece Sereny's niece Lyddy from over to Holt give her," she murmured, "burned in her pocket like a living fire-coal; she said so! And she just had to get rid of it, she said so! And 'The laborer's worthy of his hire,' she said that, too!"

A moment later Mrs. Wells halted beneath a gilded mortar and pestle, and entering the drug store, stood before its marble counter, and ordered:

"Ros'b'ry soda with plenty of sirup and plenty of cream!" As the pink and foaming compound was pushed toward her, she volunteered, "I always hanker after one of them new-fangled mixtures," she nodded in the direction of the list upon the wall, "but it's have to hanker! For s'posen, just s'posen I didn't like it and couldn't drink it, and had to own up to Sereny Dodd—I'm on an arrant for her and it's her treat—that I'd spent her substance for naught! My, but she'd quote, 'Wilful waste makes woeful want,' till the chick-a-biddies went to bed and I'd want to go, too!"

Presently she set down the glass and proffering a dime, bade, "You spare just as much candy as you can for the other five cents. Sereny, she ain't expecting it, but I wouldn't be mean enough to gobble down the whole ten cents' worth, and moreover, my ma always taught me that sharing your goodies made them twice as relishing!"

As the smiling white-jacketed clerk handed out

the tiny package of candy, he gave with it two slips of yellow cardboard, at the same time dispensing some information that caused Mrs. Wells's countenance to beam radiantly. And it was with a light heart that she trod the steep ascent of Quinton Hill and displayed her spoils to Mrs. Dodd, who, glancing at the number on the soles of the shoes, declared they would fit to a T, pounced with delight upon the candy, and scrutinizing the yellow tickets demanded, "What's them?"

"Cowpens!" announced Mrs. Wells, blithely. "Cowpens! And mebbe they'll fetch me a eight-hundred-dollar automobile! Ah-h!" she clucked her tongue gleefully.

"O my sakes!" Ponderous Mrs. Dodd rocked violently to and fro, preparatory to rising. "Where is it? Out in front?"

Mrs. Wells giggled.

"Mercy me, Sereny, you're so swift! I ain't so to say got my two fists on it yet, but there's a good hope!"

Mrs. Dodd settled back. "I don't know what you're driving at, Samanthy Wells, no more'n Roger Williams's Rock out yonder!" she averred, petulantly.

"An automobile!" enunciated Mrs. Wells. "An automobile! Next week the 'pothecary shop presents an automobile to its customers, and I'm one—the clerk said so—and the lucky number wins it."

She flourished the coupons.

"And the clerk, he said, too, 'Some one's got to win it, and why not you, ma'am?' And I guess, Sereny Dodd, that you'll allow a clerk right on the spot ought to know a little bit! And when it comes," went on Mrs. Wells, "we'll lend it to some nice man for its keep, only he'll have to take you out riding every single pleasant day!"

But Mrs. Dodd interrupted, black eyes flashing, "Guess he'll take you, too, Samanthy Wells, or Sereny Dodd'll know the why and wherefore!"

"Don't get all het up!" pacified Mrs. Wells, patting her roommate's shoulder. "'Twill hold four! O me! O my! I can scarcely wait till the day dawns!"

The following week was long, long! Mrs. Wells tugged upstairs the encyclopedia lettered "A to Bau," and finding beside "Automobile" a note, "See Motor-car," remarked, philosophically, "If at first you don't succeed, try, try again!" bore the volume back to the bookcase in the lower hall, and brought up the one lettered "Mac to Nil."

Miss Sally Sloane, whose tongue by right of heredity should have had the "real French twist,"—for did not her forebears hail from the "Jar-seys?"—was consulted anxiously as to the correct pronunciation of chauffeur, garage and tonneau; but for the most part the roommates watched in fascination the many automobiles that sped past

on their way to the country club-houses beyond the borders of the town.

At last, the fateful day arrived, and when at seven o'clock Betty Macdonald, dusting the parlors, heard the thud of *The Rising Sun*, as the carrier hurled it against the front door of the Home, she at once captured it, and bustled up to the room of Mrs. Dodd and Mrs. Wells, proclaiming:

"15,484 gets it!"

"That's it, that's it!" cried Mrs. Dodd, suspending the task of tying her apron-strings, while little Mrs. Wells, like "My Son John, with one shoe off and one shoe on," shuffled across the floor, and with tremulous hands pulled forth the bureau drawer and extracted therefrom the slips of yellow pasteboard.

"O deary me!" she wailed. "O deary, deary me! If I'd only been the one after myself!"

Betty seized the tickets. "15,482 and 15,483. It's a shame, a bom'nable shame!" she sympathized.

Mrs. Dodd groaned dismally, but Mrs. Wells, after the first shock of the news, and with fine fervor, observed:

"It might have been worse, Sereny! Things always might have been worse! S'posen, just s'posen, we'd drawed that automobile, and first trip out had broke our limb! Oh, I tell you, Sereny Dodd, there's always Balm in Gilead for them as seeks it!"

But Mrs. Dodd was not to be comforted. "I don't want no Balm in Gilead, Samanthly Wells!" she sobbed. "I want a ride!"

It was during the last five minutes at the next board meeting that Miss Timpkins, to whom Betty had confided the blasting of the hopes cherished by the roommates, was relating the story.

"They were so disappointed," she commented, "particularly Mrs. Dodd. You see, since she has grown so stout, she has very few outings. Mr. Green, a sort of sixteenth cousin from Taunton, drives her out occasionally, but it's an old-fashioned carryall, high, and narrow between the seats, and it takes him and Nora and Betty a full quarter of an hour to get her in and more to get her out. And as for the electrics," the matron shook her head solemnly, "though we carry out a chair and a footstool and the conductors are most considerate and lend a helping hand, there is always some person who thinks it amusing to jest at the old lady's expense, and of course that spoils it entirely! There was that young man that took her to the clam-bake in his motor car, but that," Miss Timpkins hesitated a moment and gazed down at a pencil that she twirled mechanically in her fingers, "was in a way almost unfortunate for it gave her a taste of a pleasure that I suppose she is not likely to partake of again!"

For a moment all was very still in the Home office, save for the chug-chug and whir-whir of the big red touring-car and the green steamer

waiting outside. Then with one impulse the president and vice-president spoke. "I—" began Mrs. Waldron. "I—" began Mrs. Frater; but their voices were drowned in the unearthly din that suddenly filled the autumn air.

"Honk! Honk!" boomed the big red touring-car. "Toot! Toot!" shrilled the green steamer as they answered in unison the shrieking challenge of the siren whistle on the dark blue car just topping Quinton Hill, and Mrs. Kipp, the secretary of the board, started up, exclaiming:

"That's my husband! He's hungry for his lunch when he calls like that! I must be going, but to-morrow—"

And as Miss Timpkins grasped the import of Mrs. Kipp's words, she smiled, and the smile deepened when, a second later, Mrs. Waldron and Mrs. Frater completed their sentences in her receptive ear.

"To-morrow" had come, a crisp, cool day, one of those belonging to the oasis of days that usually comes in between the last hot wave in August and the no less hot wave that, according to Torbolton teachers and their pupils, invariably accompanies the opening week of the autumn term of the Torbolton schools. A sweet salt southerly breeze whipped the surface of the bay into tiny dancing whitecaps and gently fanned the cheeks of the occupants of the three automobiles flying across the long bridge toward the park.

Mrs. Dodd, tucked cozily in the corner of the

tonneau of the foremost, reflected, "Boldwood always said, 'Anticipation beats realization.'" She closed her eyes, and before her mental vision raced a mad procession of motor-cars, red, green and blue! And again red, green and blue! "Once a week the year round! That's the promise," she mused.

She opened her eyes. Here she actually was, sitting in the big red touring car, the green steamer pressing close behind, and last of all, the dark blue car.

She drew a sigh of contentment. "Well, I guess I'll never be real positive, for I've got 'em both." Then she spoke aloud in ecstasy, "O Samantha Wells, a thankful woman be I this day!"

"Me too!" chirped little Mrs. Wells, nestled between Mrs. Dodd and Mrs. Ford, and patting the former's knee affectionately, she went on:

"And it's all your doing, Sereny. When you wa'n't a selfish pig and didn't keep that last ten-cent piece your niece Lyddy from over to Holt give you till it burnt a hole clean through your pocket and got lost and did no good to no one, besides your having to have the pocket patched to boot, but treated Samantha Wells to a glass of ros'b'ry soda, that's when you cast bread upon the waters! And now after many days, not so very many after all though,—" she counted on her small black cotton-gloved fingers—"just nine,— it has returned to you, sweet as honey in the comb, and enough,—" Mrs. Wells

paused, and gazed about her at the blissful faces in the big red touring car, peeped over her shoulder at the green steamer, where, in the midst of happy companions, was esconced old Mrs. Farwell, and waved to Miss Sally Sloane in the dark blue car,—“enough to feed, O Sereny, enough to *feast* the multitude!”

CHAPTER XV

THE PATCHWORK KITTEN

DAY by day, September was passing, and it was a charming morning late in the month, when little Mrs. Wells, contemplating the outer world pensively, remarked to her roommate:

"Peaceful, ain't it, Sereny? Seems like the garden of Eden before the—"

She was interrupted by a wail of woe, "Miau! Miau! Miau!" There was a rush, a scramble, a rattling of the trellis outside, a resonant, "Bow-wow-wow!"

Mrs. Wells sprang up hastily and leaning from the window, announced, "It's that horrid big English mastiff from the engine-house on the boulevard, and he's chased a cat into our honeysuckle." She peered down into the thick foliage of the vine. "I can just make it out. It's black and yellow and white. Then cooingly, "You naughty doggy, stop it!"

But the mastiff paid no heed, continuing to bark vociferously.

"I'll tend to his case," affirmed Mrs. Dodd. "Go home, you beast!" she boomed; and as the dog slunk away, she adjured in mellifluous accents, "Kitty! Kitty! Co-ome, kitty!" The kitten mewled piteously, but clung still more closely to

the honeysuckle vine, and Mrs. Dodd directed:

"Samanthy Wells, you fetch me a broom."

Two minutes later, the brush end of a broom was lowered to the level of the small fugitive and by dint of coaxing, he was induced to trust himself to it and was drawn gently to the window-ledge.

"O me! O my!" grieved Mrs. Wells. "He's thin's a rail, though he ain't such a turrible young kitty."

"How folkses can, beats me," stormed Mrs. Dodd. "Hire someone to look after the dogs, put the horses out in nice spring pastur's, bargain for the whole entire family to spend the season at one of them firstclass sky-high hotels up among the Berkshires and leave little innocents like this to starve all by their lonesomes in a great city!"

The big Boston "rocker" creaked indignantly as she plumped down into it. "Here, you gimme him," she ordered. "I've had 'sperience. Boldwood and me brung up a baker's dozen of young kittens their own nateral protectors had deserted." Mrs. Dodd hugged the small creature to her breast. "Now you cut along to Betty Macdonald and say ain't she got a thimbleful of milk to spare and to heat it up a speck."

Presently Betty appeared, but as she placed a brimming saucer on the floor, she said, doubtfully, "I don't know about these actions. Miss Timpkins ain't got back from market yet, but I ain't

by no means sure she'll approve of toling cats around."

"This ain't cats, Betty Macdonald," protested Mrs. Wells, reproachfully. "It's just one leetle, teenty-tonty scrap of a kittykin! Oh, do see him a-lapping up that good breakfast with his cunning little pink tongue. O me! O my! Wa'n't he hungry?"

Soon the other ladies of the household had flocked in, and old Mrs. Farwell was begging:

"Let me hold him a spell. He's the very image of the little kitty my pa lugged all the way up from Falmouth when I wa'n't the heighth of a pudding stick, a reg'lar patchwork kitty like this, and we named him Joseph."

"Who for?" demanded Miss Sally Sloane.

"For Joseph, the son of Jacob, of course," rejoined old Mrs. Farwell, in mild surprise. She stroked the soft yellow and black and white fur. "Didn't he have a coat of many colors like this dear little pussy-cat? And I can speak a piece about him, too." She crooned, tremulously:

"I love little pussy, his coat is so warm,
And if I don't hurt him, he'll do me no harm.
I'll not pull his tail or drive him away,
But pussy and I very gently will play."

A brisk voice from the doorway addressed the group, "Why, why, ladies, what have we here?"

There was a babel of explanations and pleadings, but Miss Timpkins shook her head.

"I wish we could keep him," she answered, regretfully, "but we cannot. The by-laws are very explicit, 'No pets.' I'll notify the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, and they'll dispose of him."

As Miss Timpkins departed, Mrs. Dodd sighed:

"I s'pose them by-laws is like the ones conjured up by Mr. Mead and several other persons, and my Boldwood, he told me oncet they couldn't never be changed, not for nothing nor nobody!"

The clock was striking two when the agent for the society of the many initials mounted the polished oak stairs with the matron and was met at the top by little Mrs. Wells who besought:

"You'll be real tender with him, won't you, Mister? He's a turrible frail little mite."

"Certainly," assured the agent, amiably, and Mrs. Wells turned and led the way back to her room. But the patchwork kitten, that only a moment before had been basking in the sunshine upon the window-ledge, had disappeared; and no living being was to be seen save Mrs. Serena Dodd, drowsing in her big Boston "rocker."

"Kitty, kitty, kitty!" called Miss Timpkins. "Kitty, kitty, kitty!" called Mrs. Wells; and "Kitty, kitty, kitty," called the agent. But at last masculine patience was exhausted, and the agent declared:

"I'm in a hurry to-day, ma'am, but I'll drop in again to-morrow."

As retreating footsteps were heard along the

corridor, Mrs. Dodd opened a wary black eye. "Gone?" she breathed.

"Yes," replied Mrs. Wells, "and I'm turrible glad we didn't discover that darling kitty for I do say that not a mortal soul ought to begrudge his enj'ying a few more hours of this beeyutiful autumn weather."

"I say and I do is diff'runt." Mrs. Dodd opened wide both black eyes. "Sereny Dodd, she doos! Samanthy Wells, you shut that door."

Wonderingly, the little woman obeyed.

"Lock it," was the curt command, and Mrs. Wells locked it.

Mrs. Dodd, bending forward, pulled out the lowest bureau drawer, and raising a pudgy forefinger, whispered, "'Sh! 'Sh! Don't make a noise! If you do," with an unctuous chuckle, "if you do, you'll wake the baby up!" And there, sure enough, in the lowest bureau drawer, placidly slumbered the patchwork kitten.

"He was so happy," beamed Mrs. Dodd, "a-napping it in the sunshine that somehow or 'nother, I hadn't the heart to let him be disposed of. So soon's you skipped out into the hall, I whisked him up just as easy and popped him in out of sight. With that crack up behind where I'm always shunting things overboard, I calc'lated he wouldn't smother."

"You're so smart, Sereny," admired Mrs. Wells, "but, oh, how did you darst?"

Mrs. Dodd bridled. "Didn't darst and Sereny

Dodd wa'n't never near neighbors," she retorted, "but I don't take no credit for it. I was born so." She reached down and lifted out the kitten. "Ain't little Joseph hahnsome?"

"He is so," assented Mrs. Wells, "and Joseph's turrible appropriate, but a bit elderly, don't you think? How'd Josie do for short, Sereny?"

"I guess 'twill be Josie for short, all right," gloomily commented Mrs. Dodd, "'cording to Miss Timpkins and that Cruelty man! Howsomer, ever," her face glowed with the sudden thought, "my Boldwood always said what man had done oncet he could more'n likely do again. And don't man embrace woman? And ain't Boldwood's wife a woman? And if I've hid this patchwork kitty oncet, can't I hide him some more?"

And Mrs. Wells encouraged, "'Tennyrate, you can try, for my Absalom, he used to say, 'Try can't never be left far behind.'"

"That there patchwork kitty is on our window-ledge again," proclaimed Mrs. Dodd, boldly, that night at the supper table. "Can't Betty Macdonald give him a drink of milk?" And Miss Timpkins nodded goodnaturedly.

Promptly at two on the following day the Cruelty man arrived, but for the second time little Joseph had vanished, and while the matron glanced into the closets and Mrs. Wells—O Mrs. Wells!—peeped beneath the beds, the agent dryly observed:

"A window ledge touching a vine-covered trellis is no prison for a cat. He's miles away by now, ma'am. Good day."

"Whereas," chirped little Mrs. Wells an hour later to her assembled companions, "Betty says if all of us ladies will agree, 'No milk in our tea,' she and Nora can manage to feed little Joseph 'thout no extry expense to the Board or bothering Miss Timpkins one ioty. Resolved, 'Will we do it?' "

"We will," was the solemn chorus.

During the next week the patchwork kitten was smuggled in and out under various concealing aprons for his daily exercise in the garden. By the end of that time he had learned to climb up and down the trellis path, and while Miss Timpkins was on her tour of marketing, ten to eleven precisely each weekday morning,—there is nothing like methodical habits in the head of a household to promote harmony—Joseph entered upon his new kingdom.

He strolled in upon Miss Sally Sloane, snuggled lazily among Mrs. Ford's couch cushions, cuddled down in old Mrs. Farwell's ever ready lap and was the only dweller beneath that roof with whom bashful Mrs. Prendergast talked freely.

These were, indeed, days of fearful joy, not only days, but nights also. For often at midnight the young scamp would clamber up the trellis, and scratching on the screen would mew

imperiously, and little Mrs. Wells, starting up in her bed, would exclaim:

"There's our Josie! Ain't he clever?"

And while Mrs. Dodd was muttering, sleepily, "Most too clever!" the little woman, scurrying to the window, would lift the screen, welcoming the visitor affectionately, and as she crawled back beneath the blankets, the patchwork kitten would nestle down beside her, purring with satisfaction, only to rouse her again at daybreak, demanding instant egress.

Then the October nights grew colder, much colder, and Joseph came not once, but sometimes twice and thrice between midnight and dawn, and although Mrs. Wells still attended upon the small tyrant with alacrity, Mrs. Dodd grumbled, not

"Upon what meat doth this our Cæsar feed
That he hath grown so great?"

but it's Yankee equivalent, "Joseph's getting too big for his boots. He needs a hot loaf on his head."

Then came one morning when Mrs. Wells was found to have a headache and some fever and Mrs. Dodd was immediately transferred to another room and a trained nurse installed.

That night, a night of frosty, piercing winds, there sounded as usual from the window-ledge an urgent summons, but the nurse, a stalwart maiden and one who knew not Joseph, did not admit the young rascal, but instead cuffed his ears vigor-

ously, and while he clattered down the trellis, little Mrs. Wells wept silently among her pillows.

And when at seven o'clock, Betty Macdonald tiptoed in to make sympathetic inquiries, the little woman stretched forth an appealing hand and murmured:

"Josie traveled up to the window and *she* wouldn't let him in!"

"Never you mind," consoled Betty. "I'll see to Joseph." And an hour later the patchwork kitten, with a dish of cold water for his only sustenance and cheer, was roaming forlornly about the cellar, while Nora O'Hara was asking:

"Ain't you going to give the little fellow a bite to eat?"

"He ain't such a little fellow, after all," asserted Betty. "He was half starved when we took him in, but now he's been having his three meals a day, steady and reg'lar ever since, he's full capable of earning his own living like the rest of us."

And the patchwork kitten justified Betty's confidence, for when, on the following morning, she opened the cellar door, a haughty shape in yellow and black and white darted forth and laid at Betty's feet a small gray trophy.

"E-e-e!" screamed Nora, while Betty exulted:

"A mouse! A mouse!" Then to the matron, emerging from the dining-room, "O Miss Timpkins, Joseph's caught a mouse!"

The matron stared in amazement. "Joseph? Who's Joseph?"

"The patchwork kitten, ma'am," responded Betty. "'Twas Mrs. Farwell named him, ma'am, and now he's proved himself the grand mouser, ma'am, and ain't only a pet no longer, ma'am, don't you suppose the board will let him stay here with us, ma'am?" And Nora O'Hara chimed in:

"The old ladies, they do love Joseph to destruction."

"Joseph!" repeated the dazed Miss Timpkins. "Mrs. Farwell named him!" confusedly. "The old ladies love him." She recalled doors gliding to at her approach, stifled phrases and—"Why to be sure," regarding the sleek well-nourished feline before her, "that's where the milk the old ladies have been refusing for their tea has gone to. Dear me! Dear, dear me!" Then "Well, under the circumstances perhaps the board will consent, only—"

But the head of the household was speaking to empty air, for Betty with Joseph in her arms and Nora O'Hara at her heels was racing up the stairs to tell the joyful tidings, and while Mrs. Dodd, sitting in Sally Sloane's room, caressed the patchwork kitten, little Mrs. Wells from across the hall piped, hoarsely:

"O me! O my! Ain't we tickled 'most to pieces that that Mr. Mead and several other persons your Boldwood was acquainted with ain't never been elected to our board of managers!"

CHAPTER XVI

THE TORCHLIGHT PARADE

"'LECTION's next Tuesday," said little Mrs. Wells, picking up *The Rising Sun* the morning of the last day of October. Her hoarseness was quite gone and she was preparing to read the news of the day. "Glorious Injun Summer weather, too! They'd ought—"

"Injun Summer's in November," broke in Miss Sally Sloane, but Mrs. Dodd instantly affirmed:

"That's where you're mistook, Sally Sloane; it don't depend on times or seasons or whether it's October or November. It's just like St. Martin's Summer the Canajens tell about, and they both come along in the autumn just after the fall of the leaf. And," defiantly, as she pointed to the leaves swiftly dropping, yellow and brown, from the tall trees before the Home, "if my word ain't enough, there's the proof!"

Miss Sloane was just parting her lips for further remarks when Mrs. Ford hastily intervened:

"Going to tell us what's in the paper, Mrs. Wells?"

And little Mrs. Wells began:

"'Grand torchlight parade! Route of march—'"

"Huh!" scoffed Mrs. Dodd. "Same old route as they've trod over this last seven hundred years, I'll warrant! Meet at Three Arch Bridge, trail out Abbey Street, cut across by the cemetery, poke along down the Water Way to the bridge again, then lay down their arms and disperse 'thout one of us hill people getting so much as a side-wise squint at 'em. Them marchers," witheringly, "be a feeble folk!"

"Not this time," said Mrs. Wells. "For there's more than forty clubs of out-of-towners in it, and they ain't forgot what legs is for. And the route of march is up Quinton Hill, through Lafayette Place, and—"

"Lafayette Place!" interrupted Mrs. Ford. "Why, that's close by, just behind us!"

Mrs. Wells turned to the open window, and luxuriously inhaling the sweet fresh air, declared, "It's balmy as balmy, and there can't be any airthly reason why we couldn't promenade out to the corner this evening and enj'y the spe'tacle. I'll put it to Miss Timpkins soon's she comes up."

"She's coming now," announced Miss Sally Sloane from her post near the door. "Miss Timpkins! Mrs. Wells wants a word with you."

The next instant, Mrs. Wells, somewhat pink of cheek, was bravely presenting the case to the matron, who answered:

"Why, I have no objection, only—" she hesitated, regarding old Mrs. Farwell in her wheeled chair.

"Oh, I ain't lotting on going," averred Mrs. Farwell, in thin tremulous tones. "Some things has to be, and there's a verse of Scriptur I learned long long ago: 'When thou wast young thou . . . walkedst whither thou wouldest but when thou shalt be old . . . another shall carry thee.' And I've noted that that most always means you stay to home. Wish I could see them marchers, though."

"Never you mind," consoled Miss Timpkins, patting Mrs. Farwell's shoulder. "Betty and Nora may escort the others, but I'm going to stay right here with you. We'll open the windows and hear the music and have a good time all by ourselves."

"Now, Betty Macdonald," adjured the matron after supper, "you and Nora had better run down to Sydney Terrace—you can see the bridge from there, and the very second the parade starts, you hurry back and get the old ladies. Then there'll be just time enough for them to walk out to the corner."

At eight o'clock the two maids were pacing briskly along the boulevard at the east of the Home, but as they turned into Lafayette Place, they stopped abruptly. On the opposite side of the street a new house was building and from its foundations, extending to the middle of the road, yawned a deep wide trench flanked by mounds of dirt and lengths of earthenware pipe. A huge green-painted tool-chest, a couple of bar-

rels and a quantity of bricks completed the barricade, and from curb to curb stretched an array of brightly burning lanterns proclaiming, "No passing this way."

"Sure," ejaculated Nora O'Hara, wrathfully, "'tis an inimy has done this!"

Betty pondered for a moment and then said, tersely, "Mebbe 'tis! Mebbe 'tain't! Anyhow you hustle straight back and keep the old ladies upstairs till I get there, too."

As Nora promptly obeyed orders, Betty scaled the tool-chest; it was worth while having grown up on the Pictou farm with six venturesome elder brothers when it came to an occasion like this. Then in hot haste she dashed to Sydney Terrace. Below her sounded a bugle; and crawling forward from the bridge, like some monstrous fiery dragon, was the parade, its hundred-eyed head already on the hill and its glittering tail forking back up Abbey Street and the Water Way.

Meanwhile Nora was the center of an agitated group, with Mrs. Dodd lamenting:

"I never have any luck at all with torchlights! The first one ever was in Torbolton I was kind of under the weather, couldn't stir a peg nor raise my head from the pillow and Boldwood said it was the finest sight he'd ever seed. And next time if he hadn't up and dropped a horseshoe on his inskip, and I hadn't the heart to leave him to suffer by his lonesome and me out frolicking! And now—" she sobbed bitterly.

"Nora! Nora!" panted Betty Macdonald, who, unobserved, had entered the house and was mounting the polished oak stairs. "Nora! Nora O'Hara! You open the door on the upper porch and haul out Mrs. Dodd's big Boston rocker, and Mrs. Wells, you get Mrs. Dodd right out into it!"

She pushed by the astonished women and darted into Mrs. Farwell's room. Grasping the wheeled chair, she propelled it with its occupant into the corridor, and trundling it forward, bade imperatively, although respectfully, "Miss Timpkins, you fetch her shawl and rigolette. She's going to watch the parade from the top piazzzy. We're all going to watch it. It's coming by here. There ain't a minute to lose. Nora and me'll lug out chairs for all of you quick's we can."

Talking and laughing and jostling one another, soon all were out on the veranda, and comfortably arranged with knees pressing close against the balusters—not a back seat among them, if you please, all in the front row—peering over the broad rail eagerly, expectantly, and oh, so happy! while Betty, drawing a contented breath, explained:

"When I sensed the parade couldn't get through Lafayette Place, thinks I, this is one of them ill winds that never blows nobody no good 'less you make it, and I scrambled over and just scud. And when they topped Quinton Hill I was there, and I skipped out before them and threw up my

hands like I was Dick Turpentine and hollered! And they halted square in their tracks and began bumping back down the hill against each other, the hind ones yelling to know what was up; and the head commander most fell off his horse when I told him the trouble, and said:

“‘Great Scott! I’m a stranger here. Which way shall we go?’

“‘This way,’ said I, and I beckoned, and they followed on, and I raced ahead ’s if I had wings to my heels. Oh, here they are!’”

Round the corner of Sydney Street was swinging a column of dancing torchlights, the band in the van crashing out a rollicking melody, and Mrs. Dodd, her tears all dried, rejoiced:

“Music! And ’tis Sereny Dodd that knows the tune— ‘I’m Captain Jinks of the Horse Marines.’ Many a time and oft have I heerd my Boldwood sing that. He was the greatest crittur for music ever you see. Why, let an organ-grinder strike up before the shop, and he’d lay down his hammer and anvil just as easy, and—”

But this was no time for retrospection, with flags waving, drums beating, fifes shrilling, trombones blaring, and red fire burning till it seemed as if every nook and cranny of the universe was suffused with its crimson glow.

“Oh, look, look, Mrs. Farwell!” cried Betty Macdonald, as a transparency paused before them. “There’s something special for you.” She

chanted, blithely, "Oh, have you heard the news from Maine, Maine, Maine?"

"No, I ain't," quavered old Mrs. Farwell, "but if it's news from Maine, it's bound to be proper good news."

The parade moved on, and bashful Mrs. Prendergast called out, excitedly:

"The Rock! The Rock! And an Injun chief in front with 'What cheer, Netop?' dangling around his neck, and there's Roger Williams himself in the bow of the boat, and my grandsir's there, too! My great, great, great-grandsir! His pictur's up in the Historical Rooms, but never, no never, did I expect to see him on this mortal sp'ere!"

One awestruck moment! Then Mrs. Ford was pointing with triumphant finger at a great tri-colored wheel uplifted on the shoulders of a score of stalwart men, upon its upper rim emblazoned the legend, "We're here, let's stay!" And Mrs. Ford exulted:

"Ain't it splendid we're all one party?"

"'Cept me!" disclaimed Miss Sally Sloane, firmly. "My pa and his pa afore him away back to the tea-fight, was on tother side, and 'tain't for me to deny the faith of my fathers."

"There, there," soothed Miss Timpkins, "we won't dwell on our differences. Here's something we all love."

Advancing up the avenue was a gorgeously decorated float. Columbia herself clad in "celes-

tial white," streaked with "morning light," her "azure" tunic spangled with "stars of glory," sat high in air. About her were clustered thirteen fair maidens, the tiniest of all standing in the forefront, clasping with chubby fist the staff of the state banner, the banner of Hope, gold and blue and beautiful.

The vision rolled by.

"Hurray! Hurray!" chirped little Mrs. Wells, suddenly leaning forward. "There's my nephew Peter Rawdon! Hello, Peter!"

Someone in the ranks shouted, "How do, Aunt Samantha!" Then to the men about, "It's the Old Ladies' Home, and the old ladies are out reviewing the parade. Three cheers for 'em!"

Off came hats and caps in grand salute. Cheer rose on cheer, not three cheers, but three times three, and then a "tiger!"

Company on company trooped by, the bands playing their prettiest, "Hail Columbia," "The Red, White and Blue," "Yankee Doodle," and "America," with its soul-thrilling chords. Then tramp, tramp tramp! That was the regiment of cadets from the college on the hill, a thousand strong, in Greek helmets and nut-brown paper-cambric togas, led by their own brass band, which now broke forth into, "My grandma lives on yonder green."

One of the boys—perhaps Slater Jones, who "tended" the Home furnace—trolled, lustily, "Finest old lady ever was seen!" and the young

fellows behind joined in, and presently a mighty chorus was roaring up to the heavens.

Then the lilting measure glided softly into, "Good night, ladies! We're going to leave you now." The refrain died away in the distance, the last spark of red fire flickered out, chairs were scraped back from the balustrade.

"Dear me!" exclaimed Miss Timpkins. "It's long past ten o'clock! To bed, to bed!"

"Wait—wait a minute, ladies," exhorted Mrs. Wells. "In your behalf, let me offer a vote of thanks to Elizabeth Macdonald, to whom we are indebted for the pleasure of this evening. It's just as my ma always said, when one door shuts in this world another one opens. Leastwise it's unbolted and unbarred, though 'tain't every one knows enough to do what our Betty done—turn the knob and give the door a little shove!"

CHAPTER XVII

MRS. DODD'S COLLECTING DAY

"ONE dozen new pink-and-white striped outing flannel babies' pinning-blankets!"

Mrs. Dodd enunciated the words joyously. She snapped off her thread, dropped her open-topped steel thimble on the table, and spreading upon her knees the little garment in which she had just set the last stitch, caressed it into shape, repeating, unctuously:

"One dozen new pink-and-white striped outing flannel babies' pinning-blankets. My, but that's a lot of the Lord's little ones to keep warm!" She leaned back in her big Boston "rocker" and gazing out into the gray November day, added, "Massy knows they'll need 'em! Winter's coming in awful early this year. Folks on the Avenue look 'most froze to death!" A moment later she was listening to the great clock on the landing striking the hour of three and went on, "Full time some other people had their promises redeemed."

From the low wicker chair opposite, Mrs. Wells, knitting frantically upon a cotton yarn washcloth, uttered a breathless, "Only two more rows, Sereny, and the binding-off, and I'm ready, too!"

Without answering, Mrs. Dodd rose to her feet,

lumbered across the floor, and laid the pinning-blanket upon a pile of similar small garments at one end of her white counterpaned bed.

Then she spoke reluctantly, "Well, well, Samanthy, mebbe I shouldn't have been so forehanded neither if Mrs. Waldron and the rest of the board hadn't got so stocked up on flat-iron holders that I couldn't sell them another one to raise any more money to buy any more stuff. Anyhow, I've got one dozen new—"

"Your niece Lyddy from over to Holt is marching through the gate," interrupted Mrs. Wells.

Presently Miss Lydia Barron was greeting cheerily, "How do, Mrs. Wells! How do, Aunt Serena! Here's my contribution to your clothing society." And diving into her shopping bag, Miss Lydia produced a diminutive parcel.

"I do wish," protested Mrs. Dodd, "that you would not call it my clothing society, just because I'm collecting for it! It's yours as much as 'tis mine s'long's you donate your two new garments a year. The name of it is 'The Ye Clothed Me Society,' and it's a 'normous organization extending all over the United States and Canady and numbering thou—" She halted. The quotation from the pamphlet published annually by the society in question was left unfinished, while Mrs. Dodd stared blankly at the contents of the packet from which she had been unwrapping the paper. Then with a stiff, "Much

obleeged, Lyddy," she placed Miss Barron's contribution beside the pinning-blankets.

Her niece's countenance expressed perplexity. "Isn't that right, Aunt Serena? You said handkerchiefs, I know you said handkerchiefs."

"I did say handkerchiefs," acknowledged Mrs. Dodd, with asperity. "Certain sure I said handkerchiefs, but I meant that for them as couldn't or wouldn't do better than 'two for five, marked down for this day only.' There's always plenty of them given! I did not," with emphasis, "mean fine, pure linen, hemstitched, two-inch border handkerchiefs with a wreath of flowers embroidered in the corner and costing fifty cents if they cost one penny!"

"Seventy-five," murmured Miss Lydia.

"Worser and more of it," commented Mrs. Dodd. "Now, what I really said was 'Handkerchiefs or stockings or underwears, men's and boy's wearing apparel particklar!' But there, I ain't in the habit of peeking into gifthorses' mouths and counting their teeth, and I'm truly glad to get anything! Howsomever, next time," Mrs. Dodd's black eyes twinkled, "if you can't screw up your courage to asking for men's or boys' apparel, just you buy a good pair of single cotton sheets. The society craves them every year."

"I'll bear it in mind, Aunt Serena," rejoined Miss Lydia, then, pointing from the window, "Behold! Milady Van Dusenberry Bill's coach blocks

the way! Excuse me!" And Miss Barron disappeared through the door.

The newcomer's silken train rustled richly as she crossed the threshold and with its billowy expansiveness it seemed to fill and overflow the room. Mrs. Wells shrank back, but Mrs. Dodd stood her ground sturdily.

"Huh!" she muttered to herself. "Guess I ain't skeered of Barbary Bill! Tied on her pinafore too many times whilst I housekept for her pa 'twixt his two wives!"

The next instant she found herself encircled by a pair of velvet clad arms, her nose buried in costly furs, the ostrich plumes of a huge picture hat nodding above her and as she emerged from this ardent embrace, Mrs. Van Dusenberry Bill's tripping accents saluted her.

"So pleased and charmed to see you, dear Aunty Dodd. When I awoke this morning and removed the slip from the calendar and espied the date and perused those inspiriting lines:

'While the poor gather round to the end of time,
May this bright flower of charity display
Its bloom, unfolding at the appointed day,'

I said to Van, 'That means me, for to-day is the collection for Aunty Dodd's clothing society.'"

Mrs. Dodd parted her lips to remonstrate, thought better of it, and closed them resignedly.

From her fluffy muff Mrs. Bill extracted a tiny

roll and thrust it into Mrs. Dodd's hands which she clasped between both her own.

"It is a small offering, not at all what I long to give you, dear Aunty Dodd, but such as it is, a vast deal of love and kindly feeling goes with it." She beamed down upon her hostess, kissed her upon both cheeks and with a last pressure of the imprisoned hands and a final "Best wishes for your noble undertaking, Aunty Dodd," Mrs. Van Dusenberry Bill frou-froued from the room.

Mrs. Dodd untied the blue ribbon that bound the "small offering" and tore off the covering. For a full minute there was silence. Then Mrs. Dodd groaned.

"I was positive 'twas handkerchiefs, too! And I kept praying, 'Lord, Lord, give me a thankful heart!' and they're shoe-strings!"

"Why-ee!" ejaculated little Mrs. Wells, shrilly. "Why-ee, Sereny Dodd, I never heerd the like!"

"Well, you hear it now," retorted Mrs. Dodd, wrathfully. "Want to hear it again? Shoe-strings! Shoe-strings!" She glared at the offending objects in her plump palm.

"There, there," comforted Mrs. Wells, "I wouldn't feel bad a mite, Sereny. There has to be shoe-strings, and like enough Barbary Bill thinks shoes grow on bushes! She was reared in the lap of luxury as you might say, and I wouldn't wonder if her bare toes hadn't never touched cold cobblestones in all her nateral born life. Tennyrate it counts two more, and my

facecloths are all done and they make another two. Why, you've got eighteen already!"

"Yes," answered Mrs. Dodd, grimly, "and twelve I made myself!"

It was seven o'clock, and again Miss Lydia Barron had ascended the stairs at the Torbolton Home for Indigent Females.

"Dear me, Aunt Serena, but your bed looks packed ready to start. Guess your members all turned up!"

"They did so," affirmed Mrs. Dodd, happily. "Miss Sally Sloane, she hadn't joined at all, but she donated well. Samanthy and me we felt condemned when we saw what 'twas, for we'd been remarking only last night on how scant she'd made her new print bedgowns, and there, she'd narrowed the gores and skinned on the flounces till she'd squeezed out two of the elegantest little girls' calico petticoats ever you cast eyes on. And Betty Macdonald fetched in a punkin hood, all wadded, and a pair of speckled leggings like they wear down in Pictou County, and said she wouldn't doane them in this town for money! And I could have 'em and welcome. Betty's generous as they make them! And Cousin John from over Ta'nton way lugged in a bundle from Luelly—I never even asked her to contribute, only sent a last year's report with my name written big and black and bold out on the aidge—and there were six new dish-towels and six new hand-towels and two lovely pin-and-spool worsted

lamp-mats from dear little Ethelindy and Cousin John said if the society wasn't accepting ornaments they could tack on tapes and use 'em for chest protectors. And when I saw him standing up so smiling and pleasant I took my life in my hand and said I, 'Cousin John, I'm all fixed for but my moneyed member,' and with that he hauled out a crisp one-dollar greenback and tucked it into my hand."

"Don't forget to tell your niece Lyddy 'bout them nice checked gingham aperns," piped up little Mrs. Wells.

"Massy sakes, no!" said Mrs. Dodd. "'Twas Miss Baizel fetched them. She's a seamstress, goes out by the day, lame, and poorer than Job's turkey's littlest picked chicken ever was. But she's got the giving sperit! She'd been up on Nob Hill all day, and was white's a ghost, and I inquired straight out, 'What did you have for lunch?' and she answered up, just as sprightly, 'Some nice Graham crackers and a glass of good fresh water!' Didn't even look criss-cross, and I said, 'You set by and have a cup of tea along of me.' They've been sending me up my supper lately and I calc'lated to divide 'even Stephen.'

"But Samanthy, she stole downstairs and told Miss Timpkins all about it. And I will say Miss Timpkins has a heart of gold. She sent up an extry plate and cup and saucer and two portions of cornbeef hash and hot biscuit and clove gingerbread and I got out that tumbler of grape

jell you brung me in tother day and 'twas a sight to make angels sing to see how they relished! And two cups of good strong tea! I didn't water it down an atom. No ma'am! Returned that hot water pitcher full to the brim. Miss Baizel's gone now, but how come you back, Niece Lyddy?"

From beneath her voluminous cape, Miss Barron shook forth sweeping folds of white. "Best English drilling," she proclaimed, "corded with Turkey red on collars and cuffs, and warranted tough as sole leather!"

"O Lyddy, Lyddy!" Mrs. Dodd laughed outright in her glee. "If it wa'n't clever of you to go and get them men's apparel after all. That makes me thirty-six pieces, not counting Barbary Bill's two bunches of shoe-strings. Unless," she put forth a tentative hand, "unless, Lyddy, you want to take back the handkerchiefs?"

"No, indeed, Aunt Serena! Your collection wouldn't be complete without them. You haven't," mischievously, "got one single one besides! Well, good-by, it's train time." And Mrs. Dodd was left, contemplating rapturously the gallant array upon the white counterpaned bed.

Presently she spoke, but it was in an undertone and to herself, "I've a notion to keep back some of them pinning-blankets! Folks may not do so well another year, and all I really must

have is the twenty-two." She went on reflectively, "It's sort of new-broomy this year!"

She glanced toward Mrs. Wells who was gazing abstractedly out upon the twinkling lights of the Avenue. With sudden resolution Mrs. Dodd rose, gathered up ten of the pinning-blankets and treading softly across the floor, laid them away in the depths of the bureau.

Retracing her steps, she sank into her big Boston "rocker," rested her fat elbows upon its broad arms, leaned her head against the cushion at the back, and drew a sigh of contentment. But her repose was only momentary. Her head popped up.

"My sakes alive, Samanthy Wells!" she exclaimed. "If you and me ain't neglecting our plain everyday Christian duties, just because Sereny Dodd's going to be a director in 'The Ye Clothed Me Society!' Do you know what we ain't done that we'd ought to have done, Samanthy Wells?"

Mrs. Wells turned from the window. Her startled eyes followed the direction of Mrs. Dodd's finger and fell upon the calf-skin covered Bible on the table. "My stars, Sereny!" gasped the little woman. "Our course reading!" She took the Bible and opened it.

Again Mrs. Dodd leaned back her head upon the cushion and an expression of calm benignity crept over her face.

"Fifth Chapter of the Acts of the Apostles,"

began Mrs. Wells, very clearly. "‘But a certain man named Ananias with Sapphira, his wife, sold a possession and—’" Her voice trailed off into indistinctness, and she grew very pale.

"What you mumbling like that for, Samantha?" impatiently demanded Mrs. Dodd. "Can't hear nothing you say! Read that out again!"

And Mrs. Wells read it out again, though falteringly, "‘But a certain man named Ananias with Sapphira, his wife, sold a possession and kept back part of the price!’" Mrs. Wells stopped. "O Sereny," she wailed, "kept back part of the price!"

Mrs. Dodd sat up very straight in her chair. Bewilderment, then indignation showed in her countenance. A spot of scarlet blazed on each cheek.

"Why, Samantha," she stammered. "Why, Samantha Wells! Are you comparing me with Ananias and Sapphira? Me, Sereny Dodd, Boldwood Dodd's lawful widow, and your faithful companion, lo, these many years? Oh! Oh! Samantha!"

The tears were rolling down her plump cheeks as she ponderously walked to the bureau, and pulling out a drawer, disclosed to Mrs. Wells's astonished eyes, ten "new pink-and-white striped outing flannel babies' pinning-blankets," and as she feverishly dragged them forth, she continued:

"I'm afraid I'm a wicked old woman, Samantha!"

But I really don't think 'twas more than a passing idee. Truly I don't believe I'd 've done it."

She cast an appealing look at Mrs. Wells, who, an instant later, precipitated herself upon Mrs. Dodd's ample bosom, sobbing wildly:

"O Sereny, Sereny! We're *two* wicked old women, each more 'niquitous than the other, for Nephew Peter paid me enough for them paper lamplighters to buy cotton for four wash-cloths, and I knitted four, but I kept back two to give away for Christmas presents. That's why I was so long finishing up that last one, 'twas the fourth 'stead of the second! Oh, but my conscience has pricked me sore, Sereny, Sereny!"

Mrs. Dodd stood aghast. Her tears dried, her color faded, and she spoke with conviction:

"I knew this 'Ye Clothed Me Society' business was bound to be an awful test of character, an awful, awful test! But little did Sereny Dodd realize who was going to be the individooals tried and found wanting! Howsomever," with solemn fervor, "confession is good for the soul and repentance ain't never too late, 'specially 'fore we've done the deed. You spunk along with them wash-cloths, Samantha Wells, and we'll wrop up that bundle now afore you and me fall by the wayside again!"

CHAPTER XVIII

THE CHRISTMAS BLESSING

THANKSGIVING was over, and in the comfortable south-west front corner room, little Mrs. Wells was swaying to and fro in her low willow sewing-chair, crooning softly to herself, "Christmas is coming, o-ho, o-ho! Christmas is coming, o-ho!"

"How soon, Samantha?" inquired Mrs. Dodd. "Figured it out?"

"Yes," was the prompt reply. "Four weeks and one day exact from to-morrow. It may seem a bit early to be getting ready for it, but when folkses admire to make Christmas presents the way you and me do, Sereny—"

"And when also," broke in Mrs. Dodd, "we can't raise a copper penny, no, not so much as a leather sixpence between us to go shopping with, and is simply obleeged to conjure everything out of something less than nothing, why then—" slowly.

"Why, then," encouraged Mrs. Wells, "we can't start in too early. It takes loads and loads of time, but that's wherein Sereny Dodd and Samantha Wells is rich as the richest."

"We have got all there is," acknowledged her roommate. "What's that you're working on?"

"A darning-needle holder," answered Mrs.

Wells, displaying for inspection a tiny sausage-shaped roll of emerald green satin, "for Betty Macdonald's Christmas gift. Nora O'Hara clipped off the end of her best sash to make it, and I calc'late you 'n' me can scrape up needles enough to stock it, so's it can go from us both."

"Certain," declared Mrs. Dodd, with enthusiasm. "And we can always borry one back in case. Betty'll be perfectly willing; she's a good child."

"Good, gooder, goodest," continued Mrs. Wells. "And I did long and want to buy her one of them raging fur boars, but I guess 'want must be my master,' like he's often been before. Anyhow, I mean well."

"You mean well, Samanthy," averred Mrs. Dodd, stoutly, "and you do well 'cording to your means." She leaned forward and lifted an imperative forefinger. "Now let me talk. I ain't told you yet something else you and me are going to do, something grand!"

Mrs. Wells listened with interest, her small peaked face all aglow, while Mrs. Dodd expounded:

"I've been a-trying to get at the doing of it for years on eend, but 'tain't been a speck of use. The way folkse have been scairt of wearing anything bright or heart-warming has been to my notion a real reflection on the Lord's own handiwork. Ain't the birds and the flowers and the dawn and the sunset dressed up gorgeous? They

be. But folkses is doing better now, and so'm I. She'll be awful pleased with it, I persume."

"She? Who? What?" demanded Mrs. Wells.

From the light-stand drawer before her, Mrs. Dodd extracted a parcel of gay-hued silks, proclaiming solemnly, "Mrs. Waldron, president of our board, and the crazy-patchwork sofa-cushion cover we will surprise her with on Christmas Day."

The little woman opposite uttered a cry of delight.

"O me, O my!" she exclaimed. "If that ain't providential! Why, I can contribute my mite, too! There's a square of the green left over from the darning-needle holder, and Betty Macdonald donated me the orange panne velvet off her last winter's hat, and though it's faded in spots, after they're nipped out, and I've made the carrot pincushion for Nora Betty give it me for, there'll be an elegant good piece besides."

"Elegant, elegant!" approved Mrs. Dodd, bringing her pudgy palms together resoundingly. "Orange is turrible scarce, too. Just turrible. Why, I ain't—"

"And," interrupted Mrs. Wells, frenziedly rummaging through her work-basket, "here's oceans of that waste silk my nephew, Peter Rawdon, fetched me oncet on a time. All the colors of the rainbow and half a hundred more."

She shook out the tangle of silks, and Mrs. Dodd rejoiced:

"You surely are an old reliable, Samantha!" Then, questioningly, "You can feather-stitch?"

"I know how, but I ain't never practiced much," deprecated the little woman.

"Well, you can 'practice makes perfect' on this, all right," assured her roommate. "There'll be an awful lot to do on it, for Sereny Dodd, she don't even know how. But she done Kensington in her youth, and there ain't a doubt that she'll pick it up again, if she's driv' hard enough."

And so, in glad anticipation, the sofa-cushion cover was begun, and day in and day out, Mrs. Wells catstitched and featherstitched, chainstitched and starstitched, brierstitched and French-knotted, while Mrs. Dodd, with anxious, determined old fingers and a permanent scowl on her brow, "done Kensington."

At last the brilliant mosaic of colors was finished, and as it lay outspread upon the white counterpane, the two women contemplated it with ecstasy.

Presently Mrs. Dodd burst forth, "That rose-pink taffety like my niece Lyddy from over to Holt's best waist is bee-yutiful, though sometimes I sort of mistrust perhaps the cardinal satin like her second-best is full as hahnsome. They both give me an awful happy feeling!"

"That sky-blue from Miss Timpkins's gown is lovely," ventured Mrs. Wells.

"Mebbe," admitted Mrs. Dodd. "You all say so, but blue freezes me up worse than the purple

you cut out of the necktie you begged from your nephew, Peter Rawdon. But there," she chuckled genially, "I'm e'enamost tickled to death with every identical one on 'em! The plums and the prunes and the navies and browns and all the storm-cloudy shades set off our embroidery splendid." She paused, but a moment later continued earnestly, "'Twas a noble thought of yours, Samanthy, to trace off them pictur's in the back of the magazines; that baby-shoe outlined in pink floss is just sweet!"

"Oh, that ain't nothing," modestly disclaimed Mrs. Wells. "Nor the kites nor the pitchforks! But your real hand-wrought, double-threaded, standy-out harps and crowns and anchors with 'Hope' printed along the sharves, they beat the Dutch and Tom Walker! I never, no, never in all my life ever see the like!"

Mrs. Dodd preened herself. "I done my leetle best," she said, complacently.

"But now comes the tug of war," piped up Mrs. Wells. "What be you conceiting to line it with, Sereny?"

The radiance died out of Mrs. Dodd's countenance. "I ain't an idee," she rejoined, plaintively. "Not more'n little Ethelindy Green over to Ta'nton. It's worrying me something awful! My sakes, if I only had the piece-bag I had when I was first married and kept a-hung up in the ell chamber! There was stuff and stuff and stuff again, if you please."

"I 'spect so," smiled Mrs. Wells, "but then's then and now's now. But I've got a scheme. Want to hear it?" and as Mrs. Dodd nodded eagerly, the little woman went on:

"You can take it or leave it just as you choose, but here 'tis. Far's I can see, there can't a soul on airth stop you 'less you let on beforehand. And they can't then, if you stick to it. 'Tain't their business in one way though I ain't denying it is in another. 'Tennyrate, you need'nt fla'nt it under their noses, not immejiate anyhow. Leastwise I shouldn't! And they say it's righteous judgment to judge others by yourself. And I can't imagine why anyone should care but you. But p'raps you'd better decide for yourself. I'll be satisfied either way."

"Samanthy Wells!" exploded Mrs. Dodd. "You tell me, you tell me quick!"

"It's your new flannelet dressing-sack," whispered Mrs. Wells.

"My new flannelet dressing-sack!"

"'Sh! 'Sh! Don't holler so!" cautioned Mrs. Wells. "Yes, ma'am, your new pink flannelet dressing-sack! I'd offer mine instanter if 'twa'nt gored so turrible, but yours is just gethered onto the collar-band, and a good po'tion of the middle would fit us out complete. I'll cadgel in a piece of the old one so you won't ketch cold, but I warn you, Sereny, you mustn't turn your back on anybody, be he friend or foe!"

"Huh!" grunted Mrs. Dodd. "Ever seen me?"

It was Christmas Eve. Once more upon the white counterpane was outspread in all its glory the crazy-patchwork sofa-cushion cover.

"Done! Well done!" pronounced little Mrs. Wells. "Three sides of that pink flannellet lining is over and overed to the front, tight's a drum, and the fourth aidge basted down so Mrs. Waldron can whip it up in a hurry. Though I'm turribly sorry we didn't get to get that scarlet and gold cord you hankered so for, Sereny."

"'Twould have been mighty perky!" sighed Mrs. Dodd. "Howsomever, them big fluffy woolly tassels and the nice thick twisty cord off your blanket wrapper ain't to be despised!"

Mrs. Wells viewed the sofa-cushion cover pensively. "There's just one fault," she hazarded. "It's too turrible flat. Now if my nephew Peter Rawdon—"

"Don't you bother about your nephew Peter Rawdon, nor yet about my niece Lyddy from over to Holt," admonished Mrs. Dodd. "I'm a-running this job, and," with ponderous dignity, "I intend to plump out that cushion cover with my own bed pillow!"

Mrs. Wells opened wide her blue eyes. "Why—why," she stammered, "what will Miss Timpkins say?"

"What will Sereny Dodd's poor weary head rest on this night, you'd better ask!" reproached Mrs. Dodd.

"This night!" repeated Mrs. Wells. "But,

Sereny, ain't you fearful Mrs. Waldron will think you're presenting the pillow for good?"

"Shan't 'low her the chance," retorted Mrs. Dodd. "You be sure to tack a note to the *outside* of the bundle, saying the pillow ain't ours to give, that it belongs to the Home, and won't she send it back first thing to-morrow morning!"

"My, but you are clever!" applauded Mrs. Wells. "But I'll plump out the cover with *my* pillow, Sereny. I'll fold up our two petticoats to sleep on to-night. No, no," as Mrs. Dodd would have protested, "tain't no hardship for a scrap of a thing like me! I'd just love to!"

Eleven o'clock was striking when little Mrs. Wells, awaking from uneasy slumbers, sat up in bed.

"Ouch!" said she. "Them sasser buttons on Sereny's petticoat is some ann'ying! It's lucky," giggling, "her poor weary head's on her pillow as usual."

A moment later, she slipped to the floor and padded quietly across to the mantel. Then scurrying back, she cuddled down under the bedclothes, and murmured in great content:

"'It's more blessed to give than receive!' Sereny and me's done it faithful. And from the feelings of them stockings of ours, jamfull from knee to toe, and mine being the littlest, things peeking out from the top, seem zif other folkses ain't going to lack the Christmas blessing neither!" She closed her soft blue eyes. "Now

I'd best go straight to sleep, so's to be up bright
and early in the morning to wish Sereny a Merry
Christmas and Happy New Year!"

THE END

